

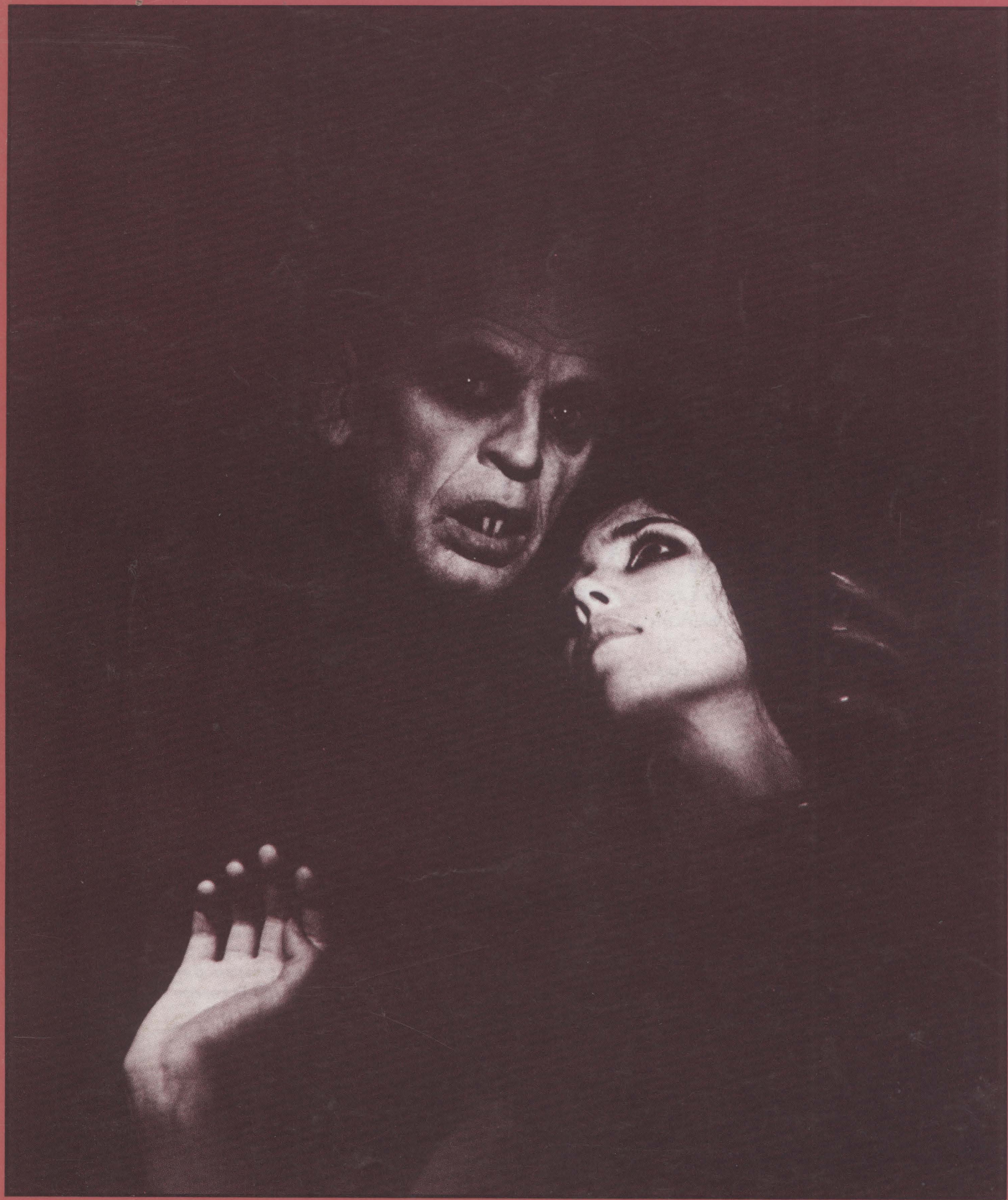


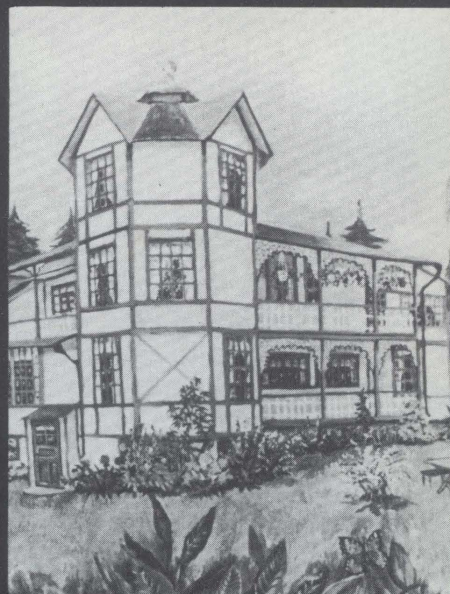
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FILM QUARTERLY

AUTUMN 1978

SIGHT AND SOUND





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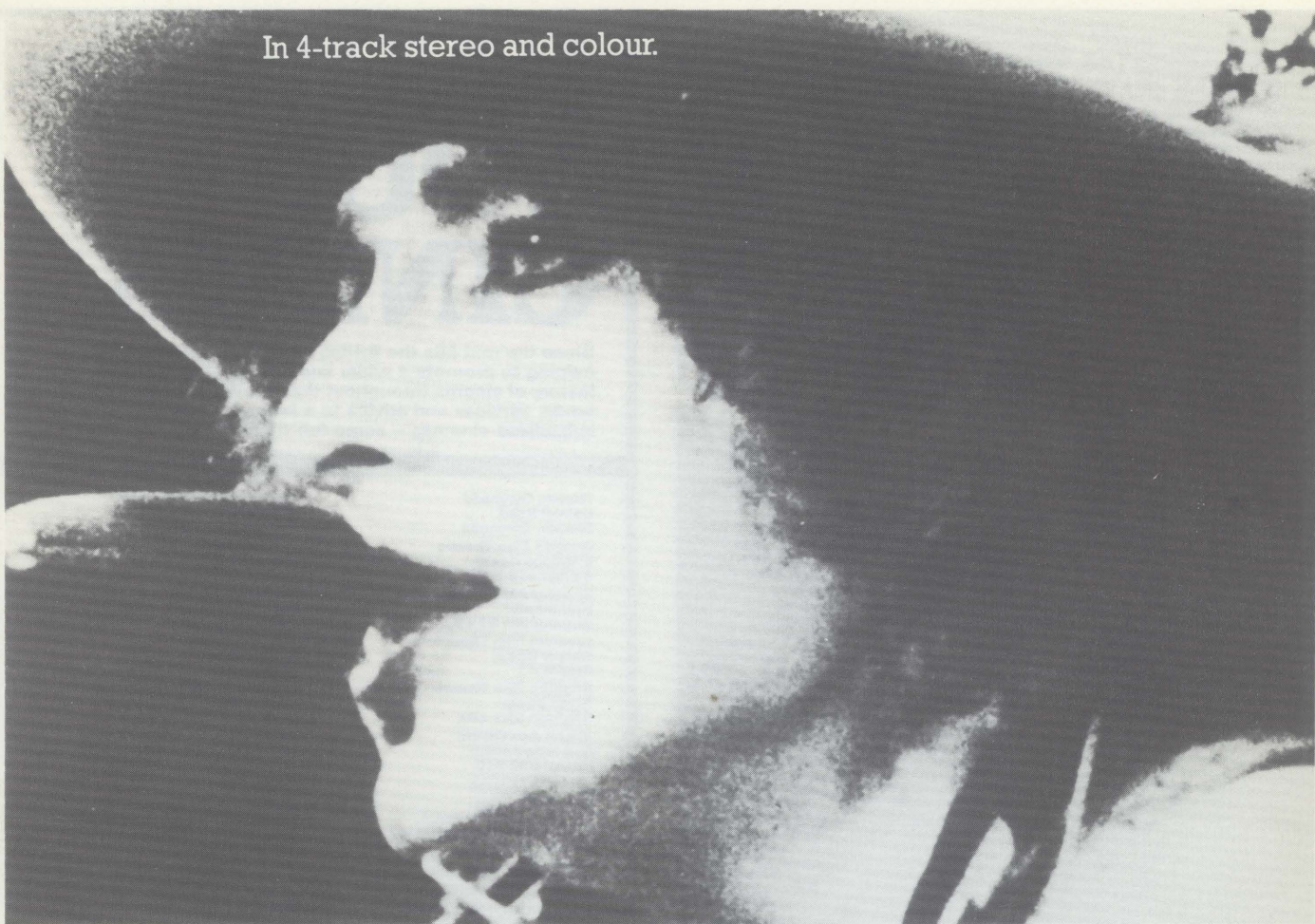
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SIGHT AND SOUND

AUTUMN 1978

Volume 47 No. 4

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*On the cover: Klaus Kinski and
Isabelle Adjani in Werner Herzog's
'Nosferatu'*

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Beverly Walker

Werner Herzog's

'Faith is an amazing faculty of man which enables him to believe those things he knows to be untrue.'—Lucy Harker to Dr. Van Helsing

'Evil is on the way.'—Jonathan Harker to a Mother Superior

'It is not an accident I make this film now.'—Werner Herzog to an assemblage of journalists

NOSFERATU

The scene is recollected like a dream: I am standing barefoot in the middle of a poor Czechoslovak farmer's hut, dressed in a nun's robe of white silk, surrounded by dark-skinned gypsies. Next to me is Dominique, the very serious make-up assistant, playing a doctor and next to him is a real actor, Bruno Ganz, perspiring and ashen. He is supposedly ill, having fallen from Count Dracula's castle while escaping, and indeed he looks rather ill. Across from us are the farmer and his wife, looking like a portrait by Thomas Hart Benton, and in my mind are passing images already committed to celluloid: Klaus Kinski running across a square, his emerald green cape fluttering behind him like the wings of a primeval insect; Isabelle Adjani staring sadly from a window; Jacques Dufilho, strapped to the wheel of his death-boat, floating mysteriously into harbour.

A cathedral-like silence has seized the room, and the lights are so bright and definitive that I feel caught in space and time. Activity outside the illuminated rectangle is barely perceptible: everyone moves very slowly, as if under water; the faces are opaque and grave.

This pre-shooting preparation was eerily like the rushes I had seen of the film we were finishing, Werner Herzog's *Nosferatu*, and the ensuing day's work provided more insights into the creation of this dark fairy tale than all the preceding weeks of watching this unorthodox production unfold from behind the camera.

A new reading of the Dracula legend, Herzog's film is both an homage to and loosely based upon F. W. Murnau's 1922 silent classic, *Nosferatu*, a *Symphony of Horror*, the film which began the vampire genre. Both in turn draw on Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, *Dracula*. But except for the plot skeleton and a preoccupation with the wages of fear, Herzog's film is quite different from Murnau's and, indeed, from all those in between. Calling it 'a new version of the subject,' to be seen, 'in the same respect as various works about Jeanne d'Arc and Jesus Christ,' he continues the dissection of bourgeois complacency begun in earnest with *Kaspar Hauser*. The basic story line has been used countless times: a real estate agent sends his employee to Transylvania to sell Count Dracula a house. Imprisoned by the 'undead' monster ('nosferatu' is a Rumanian word meaning 'undead'), he finally escapes, but arrives back home too late to prevent catastrophe. His wife, in an ultimate act of sacrificial love, destroys the vampire.

Starring Klaus Kinski as the Count, and Isabelle Adjani and Bruno Ganz as the couple destroyed by him, *Nosferatu* is something of a turning point for the 36-year-old director. For the first time, Herzog has an adequate budget and the backing of the film establishment. Made in English (and, secondarily, German), the film will be distributed by 20th Century Fox, currently America's most adventurous studio. Herzog is producing it himself and has complete artistic control and production autonomy, a rare if not unprecedented privilege for a director whose austere vision has yet to connect with the broad-based (American) public. But Fox is

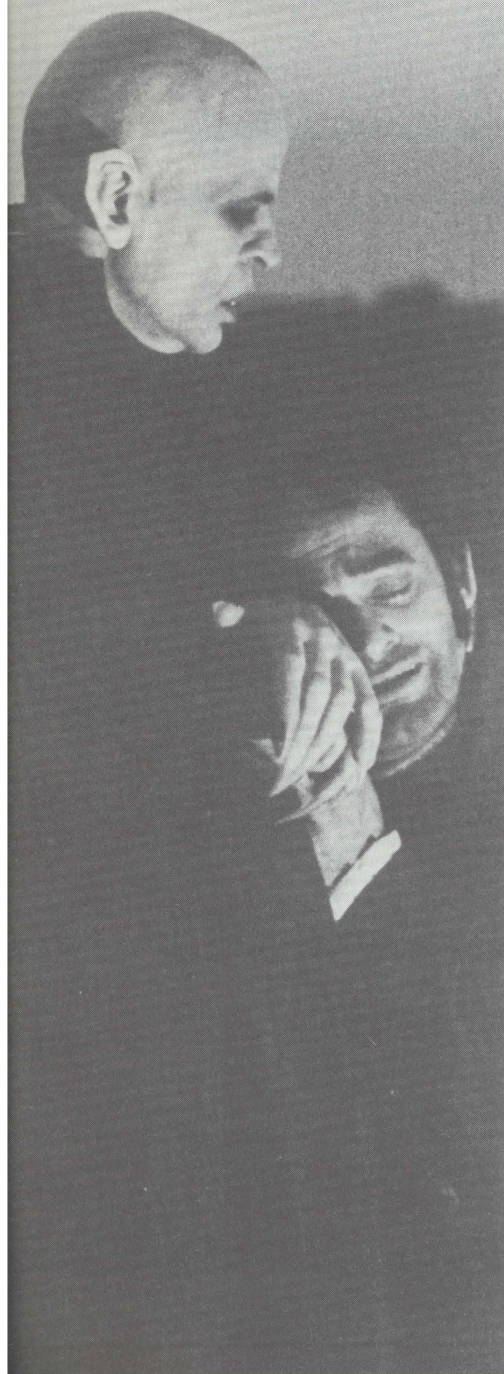
well aware of his standing in Europe, and with critics and many young filmgoers everywhere, and agreed to participate in the project under his precise conditions. They did not even see a script until two weeks before filming began in the Netherlands.

The scene in which I took part was taking place in the High Tatra, the mountain terrain on Czechoslovakia's Polish border, serving the film as the Carpathian Mountains. We are nearing completion after two tortuous months in Delft (Holland), Lübeck (West Germany), Pernstein and Telč (Czechoslovakia). Kinski and Adjani have left, and the remaining scenes involve Bruno Ganz, a former German stage star who became a major cinema actor with his fifth film in four years, Wim Wenders' *The American Friend*. I am here to assist with the English dialogue, and like almost everyone else on the 'team'—one rarely hears the word 'crew'—I now find myself in front of the camera.

These cameos are 'treats' awarded to Herzog's helpers like the Toblerone chocolate he proffers at special moments, a small but telling manifestation of his genius for bringing everyone into his particular universe. They also provide his work with a singular continuity and, at least for himself and those involved, blur the distinction between process and result. The roles are eagerly sought as a sign of his approval, and each one seems uncannily apt because Herzog relies almost entirely upon a performer's persona in casting. He says he first became interested in Isabelle Adjani from the poster—not the film—of *Adèle H.*, and he cast several roles in *Nosferatu* from photographs. (He cast himself as a monk.)

Herzog's repetitive—and conscious—use of the same actors in different films has often been noted. Walter Ladengast and Clemens Scheitz, the two elderly gentlemen from *Kaspar Hauser*, are in this film (Scheitz was also in *Stroszek*); Klaus Kinski was, of course, the volatile star of *Aguirre*, *Wrath of God* and also of *Woyzeck*, the film Herzog began on the heels of *Nosferatu*. The current scenario of *Fitzcarraldo*, his next project, includes roles for many major performers in

Dracula instructs his 'agent' Renfield (novelist and artist Roland Topor) to spread destruction. Photo: Eva Sereny/Sygma



previous films; but of equal significance is the utilisation of his highly individual team. After watching the filming at Pernstein Castle, a young Czech woman said, 'I think they make this film for just themselves.' It was an astute observation.

Though the *Nosferatu* group included French, Dutch and Czech technicians in the respective locations, as required by co-production and other legalities, the core of Herzog's unit are young Germans who have worked with him for some time. Jörg Schmidt-Reitwein, the cinematographer of *La Soufrière*, *Kaspar Hauser* and *Heart of Glass*, among other films, has known him for ten years and actually lived with the Herzogs for three of those; executive producer Walter Saxer has managed all his productions since *Aguirre*. Others, notably Henning von Gierke and Gisela Storch, the production and costume designers, and their assistants, have been with him since *Kaspar Hauser* and have never worked on anyone else's films. Von Gierke is a successful painter and Storch works at Schaubühne Berlin, the theatre where Bruno Ganz reached his apogee as an actor. Their assistants included a professor of political science, another of rarefied mathematics and a painter/collagist who has a workshop for children in Munich.

It is a unique and gifted group whom one would never find on a 'normal' production because of union regulations. (Germany has no film unions except for actors.) They are Herzog's collaborators in the most profound meaning of the term; indeed, it is obvious that they have definitively influenced the look—if not the theme—of his films. *Kaspar Hauser*, *Heart of Glass*, *Nosferatu* and *Woyzeck* are of a piece, reflecting the refined and painterly sensibilities of the Schmidt-Reitwein/von Gierke/Storch triumvirate—very different from *Aguirre* and *Stroszek*, shot by Thomas Mauch. They are a kind of 'family'; protective of Herzog and of their relationship to him; fiercely loyal to each other; convinced of their importance to his work and monumentally uninterested in the exigencies of film as an industry. 'We do not like stars and we do not like these press people because they only come for the stars,' one of them said adamantly, and she was merely echoing prevailing sentiments. They were openly sceptical about the film's American connection, and the reception to anyone perceived as representing those interests could be quite frosty.

Additionally, it was almost impossible for an 'outsider' to apprehend either the interior creative dynamics or the production logistics. Communication was largely in German—even to Adjani, who speaks the language fluently—and decisions also tended to be made via private asides, oblique signals and tacit understandings. An example of this 'sign language' was given by Jörg. He is filming *Nosferatu* in shimmering pastels and does not want any bright, 'pop' colours—not even one red flower sticking in a window box. When he tried to remove one for a certain scene, Herzog objected and put it back. Jörg then spotted Henning von Gierke, nodded very slightly towards the offending blossom and, when Herzog's back was turned, von Gierke replaced it with a yellow one. Like loyal but independent cardinals to Herzog's Pope, Jörg, Henning and Gisela are constantly consulting each other and making critical visual decisions without reference to Herzog.



Isabelle Adjani, as Lucy Harker, in the 17th century town square at Delft. Photo: Eva Sereny/Syigma

Obviously Herzog likes what he gets, for taking suggestions is not one of his strong points and he is genuinely devoted to these people. But for those trying equally hard to assist him, it could be an exceedingly difficult situation. Like *Nosferatu*'s theme, the production always seemed to be teetering on the brink between tyranny and chaos—except before the camera, which was sacred territory. There, the atmosphere became intensely pure and intimate, a phenomenon I never really perceived or appreciated until I experienced it myself.

As we waited within the illuminated rectangle for lighting refinements, Herzog began bringing the players under his spell. He does not speak privately with anyone nor does he play director's tricks, but he does create an extraordinary ambience, aided and abetted by his film-making family's intuitive grasp of the moment. His own belief in the sliver of life he is shaping is so complete that those participating simply follow. After a brief

explanation to the gypsies through a translator, in front of my own eyes they take on the countenance of dark angels—sombre, guarded, inaccessible. True to his penchant for people scarred by society's neglect, Herzog had become fascinated by the gypsies upon his arrival in the Tatra, and had himself fetched them from their village especially for this scene. In the days to come, he increasingly incorporated them into the fabric of the film. And expressed no sympathy for those complaining of bites from the army of fleas leaping off them. 'It's the justice of the flea!' he said, immediately placing his loyalties on the side not only of the gypsy, but also of the flea.

We rehearse twice. Herzog's comments are simple but exactly to the point. When he says urgently, 'take your time', I realise that my movement is sharp and therefore out of synchronisation with the pace and mood of the film. Like the activity I observed outside the playing area, life within this film is dreamy and somehow distanced, as if the



Some members of Herzog's team: Anja Schmidt-Zaringer (script supervisor), Walter Saxer (executive producer), Annegret Poppel (assistant costume designer), Michael Ettles (Australian producer, visiting the set), Gisela Storch (costume designer), Martin Gerbl (lighting).
Photo: Claude Charini

characters had long ago taken leave of their bodies and are now merely watching themselves, like puppets, from another place. It is perhaps not paradoxical that the film is an attack upon precisely this kind of unthinking mummification and blind obedience.

Though the last rehearsal was full of dialogue mistakes, Herzog assures us that it will be just fine and steps before the camera with the clapboard. He always holds it, believing that he alone should be the last person within the performers' magic arena before the scene begins. He crouches under the camera as we do the scene, twice fully, twice in close-up. His faith is rewarded: we do it right . . . somehow. After a break for lighting adjustments, we do another brief scene—'quickly, so it will be spontaneous'—because he has given some lines to a gypsy. Bruno Ganz, an actor with a rare sense of truth, seems extraordinarily good as he departs this last haven before catastrophe with the warning, 'Evil is on the way.' Later, he tells me it is his favourite line.

Far from being a detached observer, Herzog is so completely 'with' the performers that one feels an enormous responsibility to meet the challenge, and one also feels that the effort is just for him. I remember watching Adjani rise majestically through a trap-door into a room full of two thousand rats. Some were falling over the edge, into her hair, down her dress—but she never flinched. Kinski never lost his composure although he was coping with the most difficult make-up imaginable—false ears, false teeth, four-inch

long fingernails and elevated boots. An actor who could not swim none the less plunged into the stormy North Sea waters in the dead of night because Herzog assured him that he'd be right behind him—and was, though the two nearly drowned because the currents swept the boat a half-hour's distance away.

The intensity in Herzog's films emanates from the power of his personality and his pristine sense of truth, and its extraordinary force is not explainable or really comprehensible even when one is watching—or participating in—its creation. Sometimes I wondered if this gift was a blessing or a curse. Herzog is by now aware of his 'visionary' impact upon audiences, but there was never any evidence during the making of *Nosferatu* that he consciously tries to achieve this effect. The contrary. He violently refuses interpretation, and his creative triumvirate each told me separately that any type of psychologically or metaphysically charged discussion is strictly forbidden. 'We must not talk about this,' he will say, and wander off. The process has mystery even to them. 'We don't talk about style or atmosphere,' says Jörg, 'but we're on the same wavelength. Sometimes there must be a dictator to bring about this fusion; we accept it.' Whether in front of the camera or behind it, one has no choice but to surrender to Herzog's vision, and though this is sometimes infuriating, it also has a dangerous appeal.

As we returned to our lodgings after filming, I reflected upon the whole experience on *Nosferatu*. The obstacles had been so

enormous that I had sometimes felt the film was cursed—and yet Herzog somehow prevailed. A comment made by Isabelle Adjani some weeks earlier in Delft came to mind. We were discussing the many internal problems which were complicated by the refusal of the city to provide even a modicum of co-operation. Adjani, a perspicacious realist, finally shook her head. 'But the film won't be touched,' she said. 'It's like a benediction. You can feel it, pulling the film forward.'

A benediction. Herzog himself had set the tone at a dinner before the start of shooting. Taking the floor, one of the many times he would lecture with righteous fervour, he said, 'We do not make *Nosferatu* just for ourselves. We have a responsibility. We have the blessings of Lotte Eisner, a woman who was chased out of Germany during the time of barbarism; she is some sort of spiritual guide for us, and because she has given her blessing, we have legitimacy.'

Legitimacy is a term of import to Herzog. At an early press conference, one of the many held throughout the Delft location to prevent the city withholding all permissions, he said, 'Before the war, we had great, and what I call "legitimate", German culture. But this was broken. That is an historical fact.' Identifying Lotte Eisner, the film historian who has known nearly every great film-maker of the century, as the first person to call the New German Cinema a 'renaissance', he continued: 'My challenge in doing a new version

of *Nosferatu* is to link the great epoch of Expressionist film-making with this renaissance... to create a bridge over this historical gap.' Finally, he drew upon the memory of 'Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, a man who died too soon.' When Lotte Eisner visited the set, she said, 'I never thought I could be friends with a German again. But here I am... Werner is somehow like Murnau brought back to life.'

For a man who endorses his own line, 'I only believe what I see with my own eyes,' Herzog seems to be touched by an amazing grace. Though the 'fusion' referred to by Schmidt-Reitwein works brilliantly on a creative level, Herzog's working methods in combination with his theme came very close to undoing him in the simple matter of surviving and getting the film made.

The catastrophe wrought by the malevolent Count is the unleashing of plague-infested rats into a serene bourgeois city. The provincial 17th century town of Delft was a perfect choice. Though it had some importance three hundred years ago, it has slowly evolved—one might even say 'atrophied'—into a museum piece, albeit an exquisite one. Flowers blossom in profusion; the cobbled streets carry as many bicyclists as motorists; the windows of every dwelling are framed by sparkling white curtains. And there are the canals lined by blossoming lime trees, perfectly described in Herzog's screenplay as 'going no place but back on themselves.' Delft's New Church, in whose shadow Herzog shot many scenes, is the official burial place for kings and queens of the Netherlands. Queen Wilhelmina reportedly used to say, 'I do not go to Delft because eventually I have to go there.'

Herzog, who often displays a kind of naive candour, told the Dutch press his reasons for selecting Delft. 'It's so well ordered, so neat and beautiful, so bourgeois... I don't mean that in disrespectful terms, for bourgeois culture has made some great achievements. But just because it's so well organised, it's interesting for me as a film-maker to show the disintegration of order, the collapse of public morale.' He was equally candid about the necessity of filming with rats, the creature which was to become his *bête noire*. 'My film is about a community invaded by fear, by an anonymous terror that can hardly be named. The rats are a decisive element because they signify this invasion of fear. I ask this town with all my heart to allow me to make a few shots, in controllable areas, with the rats.' But a city that provided Johannes Vermeer with a proper tombstone only two years ago would certainly turn its back on Werner Herzog.

The picture of a large rat accompanied the Dutch newspaper's bold headline: 'PESTEPIDEMIE OP OUDE DELFT.' Translated, it said 'The plague has come to old Delft', and the accompanying article clarified the hateful metaphor. Werner Herzog, his young and predominantly German team, and ten thousand white rodents from a Hungarian laboratory had dared enter Delft to make a movie.

Like a caravan of old-time artisans, they came by truck, van and modest cars sagging with the weight of material and equipment. Settling communal style into a large house in the old section of the city, they went about their work. Coffins must be built; museums altered; properties constructed; costumes

dyed and sewn. This was not like the Lana Turner-Clark Gable movie made in Delft thirty years ago, nor like Joe Levine's luxuriantly budgeted *A Bridge Too Far* which had just left. No one could accuse the group of laziness or impropriety, but they were German, free-spirited and passionate—and they were up to something with a lot of rats.

The newspaper headline had the effect of a battle cry. Lines of resistance went up almost overnight; channels of communication were suspended. The Netherlands is renowned for its hospitality and devotion to democratic principles, and Herzog had not anticipated such resistance. True, the local officials had always hedged about the rats, but Herzog was confident he could bring them round—and why not? To a man who has braved the jungles of Peru, the Sahara, a churning volcano, Delft looked like child's play.

'We have a serious and dignified project,' he told a gathering of government officials and journalists. 'The Murnau film is the most exciting and probably the best film in German history. It was an important film, courageous, and the first to predict the barbarism which came later.' His eloquence captured the local film enthusiasts, who showed a retrospective of his work, circulated petitions and arranged a series of meetings with the Mayor and officials. 'We do not come as an invading army,' he said, mindful of the Netherlands' long occupation by Germany. 'I am a guest here, and a guest has some sort of natural right, but a very limited one. Therefore, I ask for clemency.'

The effort was exhaustive, but largely unrewarded. An incident on the first day's shooting proved a portent: a small graveyard Herzog had himself created on a sand dune the night before was, by six o'clock that morning, destroyed. The sound of 'Führer' rang out more than once, and Delft's Mayor never gave an inch. A 'safety' deposit of one hundred thousand dollars was demanded, and the company was further taxed just to film the streets. Extremely limited amounts of time were set for all exterior locations—and permission to film the rats was never given. The company was besieged by Dutch journalists and photographers; a day never passed without an article appearing about the film, always focusing on the rodent. The fear and paranoia of the citizenry mounted in the same way as in the film, through innuendo and rumour. A slow panic set in.

While all this was going on, Herzog continued making the film, altering his needs as necessary. When Kinski returned a few days late because no one had informed him of the schedule, Herzog shot something else. When Bruno Ganz was badly bruised falling off his horse, he shot with a double. If it rained, he bundled everyone into vans and said, 'We wait for sun,' and when it was so bitterly cold that everyone was nearly paralysed, he stripped to the waist—and kept filming.

Internally, morale was disintegrating. Delft is an extremely expensive city with few hotels, and a decision was made to rent a large house, put pads on the floor, hire some local girls to cook and live like monks. But this house was also the production centre and there was little privacy. Anyone off the street with nerve could walk through it day or night; hundreds of extras had to be dressed, fed and allowed access to the single toilet. The flying dog, bats, flies and other live exotica

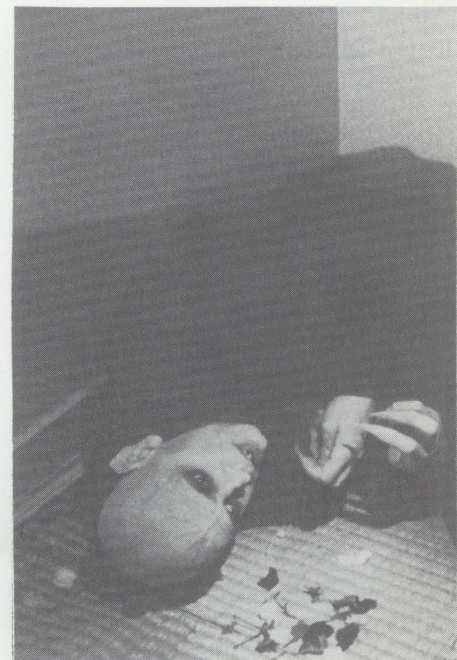
needed for the film were stored there; coffins were built in the courtyard flanking the bedrooms, and a huge pig was slaughtered there for use in a scene. After filming at four o'clock one morning, Herzog spent the remainder of the day cleaning the toilet and soothing fractured nerves.

In the midst of all this came news that Gaumont was withdrawing its support. It seemed that the Centre Nationale had to give permission for all co-productions and papers had been filed late. I asked Herzog what he was going to do. 'I will continue discussions and make the film,' he said, and left for the location.

It all culminated in a violent scene three days before the completion of filming in Delft. The ten thousand rats had been stored in a barn outside the town, where they were cared for by two young women biologists. But the farmer who owned the barn had not been feeding them properly and they were dying. When the girls reproached him, he kicked them off the farm and then refused to allow the production access to the animals—this at exactly the time Herzog had finally found a means of filming them. Herzog, accompanied by a few members of his team and the two women, went to retrieve them. They were met head-on by the farmer and a dozen workmen wielding all manner of farming tools as weapons. A large van was placed horizontally in the driveway to block their exit, and a truly nightmarish fight followed. Windscreens were smashed, cars were damaged, everyone was badly beaten, scratched and bruised. Herzog himself was almost killed when a workman drove a huge crane straight at him.

However, the rats were retrieved, filmed and later sold to laboratories, and the company moved on to Czechoslovakia. There, bruises and wounds healed; Kinski did work so brilliant that this non-star-loving team applauded him; the Centre Nationale and Gaumont finally sent the money—and *Nosferatu* at last reached completion. To me, it seemed miraculous. But I had seen the rushes and I knew Adjani was right: the film had not been touched. Something had pulled it forward.

Dracula destroyed. Photo: Eva Sereny/Sygm





THE PARTIES, ELEC AND TELEVI

Anthony Howard

'The laws governing election broadcasts,' Lord Butler of Saffron Walden once remarked with that air of world-weariness that was all his own, 'are every bit as abstruse as those of medieval theology.' He could equally have made the same comment about the custom and practice that has grown up surrounding their existence as (by now) virtually a convention of the constitution. Each year before an election a meeting is held in the House of Commons where the rival empires of Parliament and Television confront each other. It is a strange meeting—if only because the broadcasters (the representatives of the BBC and the IBA) are, for once, the patrons and the politicians the petitioners.

The broadcasting authorities have a united interest in keeping the parties' allocation of time to a minimum; the politicians—now including the Scottish Nationalist Party in addition to Labour, Liberals and Conservatives—want, not unnaturally, as much as they can get. This time, at least so far as television is concerned, we already knew the answer by the end of July: by the time the votes are counted—and Professor Robert McKenzie is gaily playing with his 'swingometer' and Dr. David Butler merrily manipulating his 'cube law'—we shall have endured five ten-minute broadcasts on behalf of the Labour Party, five on behalf of the Conservatives, three for the Liberals, three regional ones for the Scottish Nationalists and one broadcast (regional also) for Plaid Cymru.

Heavy political diet though it may seem, it is in fact a good deal lighter than it used to be. Election broadcasts—similar though always treated in a different category from the routine 'party politicals'—started on radio as long ago as 1929 when John Reith took it upon himself to give the ruling Conservative Government double the ration of time of any other party. By 1945, however, the two major parties had achieved parity and were sharing out four whole hours of radio air time between them. That allocation (with an additional 40 minutes for the Liberals) persisted until 1951, when in fact it was increased. For that year the parties were offered an additional quarter of an hour each on television (the previous year, in the 1950 general election, the soundtracks of the radio election broadcasts had been repeated on the television channel at the end of each evening's transmission).

At first, though, there was not much sign that the parties were vastly excited by this new opportunity offered to them. No party

leader took part in the original television election broadcasts—which anyway could reach considerably fewer than 10 per cent of the population. The Liberals presented one of their most venerable figures, Lord Samuel, giving what was essentially a radio talk straight to camera; the Conservatives offered Anthony Eden being somewhat softly interviewed by Leslie Mitchell, the man who had launched BBC Television all those years before in 1936; while Labour went well down its pecking order to present two future defectors—Hartley Shawcross and Christopher Mayhew¹—doing a kind of cosy double-act together. All in all, it seems safe to conclude that even for the few who watched

these broadcasts, the main interest must have lain in their technical novelty rather than in any potential for political persuasion.

Four years later, all that was in process of changing. The Conservative Government of 1951–55 had, after all, already pushed through the House of Commons (and a much more reluctant House of Lords) its Independent Television Act of 1954. The BBC—still alone holding the ring, since commercial television did not actually start up till the autumn of 1955 and the election was in May—recognised the trend of the future and on this occasion offered the two main parties one half-hour broadcast and two 15-minute ones apiece (while at the same time cunningly lopping 20 minutes off their radio allocation). The result, perhaps inevitably, was what was called at the time 'the first television election'.

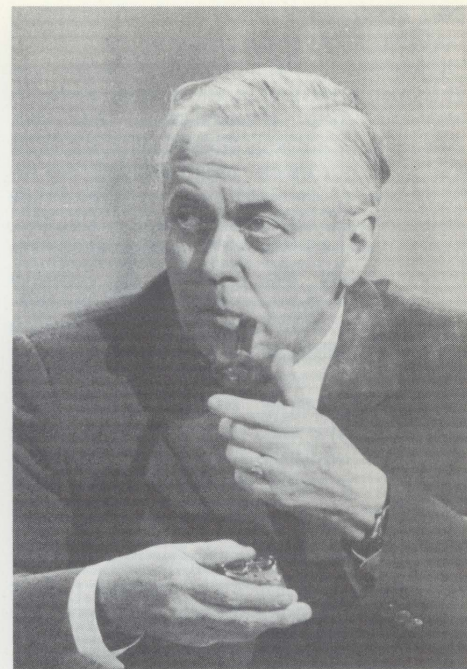
Almost certainly that was a misnomer; in 1955 radio audiences still outnumbered those for television and in point of fact (despite the television 'At Homes' that some gallant party stalwarts tried to organise to coincide with their own side's broadcasts) more people heard the nine election broadcasts on radio than watched the seven on television. Nor were the latter, with one exception, judged even at the time to be particularly effective—certainly nothing like as effective as, say, Dr. Charles Hill's famous election broadcasts in 1950 and 1951 or even Herbert Morrison's *tour de force* on radio in that same 1955 election.

The exception, however, was an interesting one. In 1955 both the Labour and Liberal Parties had in Clement Attlee and Clement Davies leaders who were well on into their seventies, men not perhaps of an age when it is easy to teach old dogs new tricks.² The

¹ Mr. Mayhew did, however, get off one line that would probably never have been allowed once television became a mass medium. He concluded an attack on a Conservative graph about the cost of living with the announcement: 'Crippen was the first criminal to be caught by wireless, the Conservative Central Office are the first criminals to be caught by television.'

² Mr. Attlee did attempt a television interview but his monosyllabic replies tended to limit its impact. Sir Winston Churchill was the last major British politician entirely to eschew the blandishments of television. Apart from mumbled remarks of thanks from within Number 10 at the time of his 80th birthday celebrations in November 1954, he never directly used the medium.

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opportunity of presenting their relatively youthful leader of 57 solo to camera seemed, however, too good to miss to the Conservatives—and they certainly made the most of it. Sir Anthony Eden's final television address to the nation (he passed up the radio alternative to his number two, Mr. Butler) ranked by common consent as the best broadcast of the election—prompting even the *New Statesman* to describe the Prime Minister, if with a slight sniff of disapproval, as 'the one man among the party leaders who is a television star' and *The Times* to utter a word of warning in due season about the possible need to cut down on election television broadcasts if only, as they put it, 'to persuade the elector back to a constituency interest'.

By now, however, it was too late to put the genie back in the box. Television electioneering had arrived and had come to stay, bringing in its wake not just problems for the parties but serious conflicts of conscience for the BBC as well. With a radio election broadcast it had always been easy: the BBC, as 'the national instrument of broadcasting', simply provided a studio and an engineer—and it was up to the politician concerned to get through his script in the given time as best he could.³ With television it was different. The politician, like it or not, had to come to terms with being a performer—and he was bound to want advice, expert guidance and possibly even require studio 'props'. The first conscience issue for the BBC was, therefore, how active a role it should be prepared to play in the presentation of a party political or election broadcast. Fairly austere rules were, perhaps wisely, laid down from the beginning. Each party was entitled to a day in the studio for each broadcast, technical advice would be available but no co-operation at all on editorial content, assistance could be given with graphics, charts and tables but the provision of elaborate sets was no part of the

BBC's responsibility. Later on some of these rules were to be slightly eroded—especially when individual party leaders got used to working with particular BBC producers like Stanley Hyland or Margaret Douglas—but even as late as the mid-1960s the BBC's emphasis on preserving its own chastity still rankled with some politicians.

The late Richard Crossman was not perhaps generally regarded as a man lacking in self-confidence—but his *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister* none the less include a vivid description of what the BBC's austere interpretation of its own proper role meant in practice even for a politician who prided himself on his gifts as 'a compulsive communicator'. Part of Crossman's diary entry for 5 November 1965 reads as follows: 'I went to Lime Grove at seven o'clock with Peter Brown [his Press Officer]. I had assumed that the BBC would lay on a host of brilliant producers for me. But in fact I found myself sitting in a deserted corner of the building with one girl—absolutely no good—and I was just told to read the script aloud in that empty place. I was exhausted and I found it incredibly difficult. I struggled time after time... it was only after two hours that I found I'd got it something like right when they played it back to me.'

True, that was a Ministerial broadcast rather than an election or even a party political one—but the incident none the less demonstrates the loneliness that the BBC's rigid interpretation of its own rules tended to inflict on the politician. Yet there were, of course, ways of getting round that kind of difficulty. The first, and perhaps most obvious, was for a political party deliberately to rely, at least at election times, on those among its own members who possessed professional experience of the medium. Interestingly enough, that was precisely what the Labour Party had the wit to do as long ago as the election of 1959. Nearly 20 years after they first went out, its five 'Britain Belongs to You' programmes—each, incidentally, in those days 20 minutes in length—still have a claim to be considered

among the most professional political broadcasts ever made in Britain.

Modelled quite openly on the highly successful BBC early evening current affairs show *Tonight* and produced by the programme's deputy editor, Alasdair Milne, they were presented each night from what was called 'The Labour Television and Operations Room'—but was, in fact, the normal *Tonight* studio in Lime Grove. Three well-known television personalities—Tony Benn, Christopher Mayhew and Woodrow Wyatt—dominated each show: Benn as anchor-man, Wyatt as the interviewer and Mayhew as the expositor. Less telegenic party leaders were relegated to a back seat, with the party leader himself, Hugh Gaitskell, allowed no more than a fourth of even the final programme. But at the same time full use was made of non-political figures, with men like Compton Mackenzie, Wolf Mankowitz, 'Freddie' Ayer and John Osborne being brought in to explain why on this occasion they would be voting Labour. These were perhaps the first political broadcasts able to stand in their own right as television programmes; and their success at least with the TV critics was instantaneous and virtually unanimous. Later on, admittedly, the criticism was heard that they had been too 'slick'—but that was only after the election had been lost. At the time there can be little doubt that their pace, their attack, their sheer irreverence did a power of good to Labour's morale in an election in which it always knew it needed to come from behind.

The Conservatives, by contrast, made at least at the beginning of the 1959 campaign no such effort to adapt to the medium. Their first broadcast, filmed earlier in the summer at Birch Grove, consisted of an almost laughably forced discussion between Mr. Macmillan⁴ and five of his cabinet colleagues.

³ Sir John Reith does, however, seem to have given Mr. Baldwin some editorial assistance, at least with his broadcast in the 1929 election: see Asa Briggs, *The Golden Age of Wireless*, p. 135.

⁴ Mr. Macmillan's opening words were: 'Well, I've asked you to come here today. I think we'd better have a word, each of us, about how we see things from now on.' He was later to add in an avuncular aside to the Chancellor of the Exchequer: 'All I can say is, Derry, you keep on at that work and we'll be all right.'

Nor did things look up much afterwards—whatever might be happening on other fronts, the television battle looked more and more as if it was being lost to the Labour Party. It was in these circumstances that Mr. Macmillan's advisers decided on a step that was not so much unprecedented as revolutionary. In strict secrecy the Prime Minister was, on the morning of 6 October, taken down to the ATV studios at Elstree where, under the direction of Norman Collins, the famous Macmillan solo talk, standing up, with only a desk, a lectern, a map and a globe as props, was recorded.

Not a word was said to anyone else—and that same evening found the two BBC producers who until then had been working on the Conservative broadcasts anxiously awaiting the arrival of the Prime Minister in the foyer at Lime Grove. As the minutes ticked by they became more and more apprehensive: would there be time for Mr. Macmillan to rehearse and perform in time for his nine o'clock slot? They need not have worried: what eventually turned up was not a car containing a Prime Minister but a dispatch rider carrying a canister of film. Even then, however, their anxieties were not over; within the BBC there were grave doubts as to whether it was constitutionally proper for the Corporation as 'the national instrument of broadcasting' to transmit an election broadcast that had been made quite independently of its own resources and which it had barely had time even to vet. Eventually, the decision was taken at the highest level that the Corporation had no alternative but to surrender to *force majeure*—and the result was not only a histrionic political performance that has never been surpassed but also a breach in the BBC's monopoly over political broadcasts that could never subsequently be repaired.

It is probably too much to claim that this bravura display by Macmillan won the 1959 election for the Tories, since all the economic ingredients for a Conservative victory were there from the beginning; but it certainly must have had its effect in limiting the Liberal vote to barely more than 1.6 million and thereby enabling the Conservatives to win by a comfortable majority of 100. The Liberals had, in fact, rather muffed their own television opportunities—wasting their first 15-minute broadcast on five unknown and none too telegenic candidates and only achieving any impact at all with their second and last broadcast by their new leader, Mr. Grimond (destined anyway to be overshadowed by Mr. Macmillan's own final appeal). It may be fair to comment here, too, that a substantial handicap the Liberals suffer from in terms of election broadcasting arises from one of the last relics of Sabbatarianism. No election broadcasts are ever permitted on a Sunday, and since none is allowed either on the day before polling, this necessarily means that the Liberals' last word always comes less than halfway through the final week of the campaign, on the Saturday of the last weekend, or almost five days before the electorate casts its vote. It is not perhaps just Liberals who are entitled to detect in this one of the built-in protections of the two-party system (the other two parties swapping the right to have the last word, depending on which happens to be in government when the election is declared).

If the 1959 election saw a departure from custom and practice in terms of a party going outside the BBC in order to get its political message across, the next election of 1964 saw a further (and to some far more controversial) development of that same departure. For in August 1964 the first ever 'soap opera'—made entirely by actors and without benefit of participation by politicians—was brought by the Conservatives to the British television screen. Entitled 'People Like Us', it was a short fictional film about a husband and wife celebrating their 13th wedding anniversary—opening with the wife slamming the door in the face of a Conservative canvasser ('We're Labour here') and then spending the rest of the day wondering why she had done it, since 'the past 13 years [conveniently also the duration of successive Conservative governments] haven't been so bad for us.' She was cast sympathetically as a fair-minded woman (with even a touch of Women's Lib—'It's humiliating for a wife

Home government. The Tories were left, therefore, with much the same problems as the Labour Party had faced in 1955 (when it mattered a good deal less): a leader who did not like, and was not at home with, the medium and a dearth of back-up figures to fill his place. Even so, the solution they eventually came up with was almost certainly the wrong one; the broadcasts were handed over to Ted Heath as presenter, while Reginald Maudling was given the task of presiding over the press conferences in Smith Square. In retrospect even the professional staff of Central Office were disposed to agree that the roles should have been reversed—Heath's machine-like command of facts and figures being suitable to dealing with questions from the press and Maudling's more genial and relaxed approach being more appropriate to addressing people in their own homes.

Yet even if that had been done, it would not have solved the central problem—which



The 1951 election: Anthony Eden was 'somewhat softly interviewed by Leslie Mitchell'

always to think like her husband') while he, poor fellow, was portrayed as a closed-minded bigot quite ready to wreck their wedding anniversary with a political quarrel. The work of the advertising agency, Colman Prentis & Varley, it was not perhaps the most sophisticated of efforts but it, predictably, caused a major row—with the Conservatives finding themselves rounded on and rebuked even by such normal press allies as the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*.

Whether chastened or not, it was not an experiment that the Conservatives repeated, at least in that election (the days of Saatchi & Saatchi were to come later). It is possible, too, that in 1964 it was a throw attempted more out of desperation than anything else; for the Conservatives found themselves that year confronting real problems. Their champion of the small screen, Harold Macmillan, had retired from the ring a year earlier and in his place they had as Prime Minister Sir Alec Douglas-Home who, whatever his other merits, was not generally regarded as God's gift to television. Worse than that, their surviving most effective performer on the box, Iain Macleod, had ruled himself out as a potential persuader by refusing to serve in the

was, of course, the challenge of putting Sir Alec Douglas-Home across to the viewer. In the opening four Conservative broadcasts his participation was kept to a minimum (a mere two minutes) and everything was staked on his final appearance on the penultimate day before polling. Once again the same arrangements were made as had worked so well with Macmillan in 1959—but, alas, on this occasion with very different results. The principal difficulty lay in Sir Alec's refusal to use an autocue or teleprompter. This meant, since he could not be expected to learn a 15-minute broadcast by heart, that his whole script had to be divided into two-minute segments that could be separately recorded; but this in turn posed another problem—that of 'jumps' as the two bits of videotape were joined together. To overcome this, Norman Collins proposed 'cutaway shots' of Home looking at his notes or merely studying his hands—and thus in fact the 15-minute broadcast, which had taken two whole days to make, was finally spliced together. The result was not happy—*The Times* cruelly announcing the following morning that it had 'proved to be a symphony in black and white delivered by a tone-deaf pianist.'

It was perhaps fortunate for the Conservatives that the Labour Party should also in 1964 have slipped back from the peaks of performance it had attained in 1959. Here the problem was not so much one of personalities (Harold Wilson, technically anyway, was a better performer than his predecessor, Hugh Gaitskell) as one of proper preparation. In contrast to 1959, when Tony Benn in particular had done a great deal of advance work on the broadcasts, before the 1964 election there appears to have been no adequate forward television planning. There was no clearly delegated chain of command in Transport House, altogether too many cooks claimed to be in charge of the kitchen and senior politicians did not take easily to being treated as if they were scullery maids by Wilson's new race of media men: the results, perhaps not surprisingly, were broadcasts that—like Winston Churchill's pudding—'lacked a theme'. Only the last one—a straight talk by Wilson to camera preceded by

displayed a quality of directness and freshness of approach that the other parties' efforts often seemed to lack. Admittedly, they have been fortunate in that the three leaders they have had over the last 20 years—Grimond, Thorpe and Steel—has each in his own way been an accomplished television performer; but they have also displayed perhaps an accidental shrewdness in bringing a light infantry approach to a medium where the other parties have tended to wheel up heavy mechanised columns.

Whether it was the example of the Liberals that was responsible or not we shall presumably never be told—but in fact the 1966 election was notable in both the major parties for a return to lay political control over election broadcasts. Labour, still smarting from the £6,000 it had wasted (on the advice of media 'experts') on unused film in 1964, went for a single, simple 'You Know Labour Government Works' message and largely relied on a studio format to put it

their model right down to having one of them announce in each programme 'We'll take the break now'—a break very skilfully used to incorporate spot commercials like the one showing a refrigerator door opening, a hand going in and, when it came out holding something, a voice saying: 'Do you recognise this? It's a frozen wage packet. Vote Labour on 18 June and you'll get it again—in the family size.' Unscrupulous, shocking, outrageous? Of course there were many in the Labour Party ready to claim that it was—but then there were also many ready to claim the same within the Conservative Party over Labour's 'Lord Algernon' party political in December 1976 or, indeed, Joe Ashton's onslaught on racism and the National Front in December 1977. Given the bland nature of most current affairs television, it is hard to see much point in having election broadcasts unless they are allowed to be that little bit more aggressive and hard-hitting than our normal 'objective, balanced' television election fare.

Nor does that necessarily mean that such broadcasts will invariably have to show a sharp, partisan cutting-edge. If Labour shone in 1959 and the Conservatives scored in 1970, then the Liberal broadcasts were undoubtedly the major television success of the first (February) 1974 election. And that success was won by their running what was in essence an 'anti-politics' campaign—a campaign based on the notion of the Liberals as the only people who could keep the party dog-fight in check. Once again, these were excellent programmes, with the Liberals displaying especial skill in their presentation of their anchor-man, Huw Thomas, as virtually an objective commentator. 'Can they keep it up till polling day?' he would ask challengingly at the end of each broadcast—and somehow the very neutrality of the question encouraged the viewer to hope that they did.

The conclusion, then, seems to be clear—and not inevitably to be the one that professional broadcasters tend to suggest. Stanley Hyland, for instance, with all the weight of experience as a BBC political producer through four elections behind him, today quite candidly says that he hates seeing what was once 'an honourable trade surrendering to the silver gloss of advertising.' Like him, I would certainly regret seeing election broadcasts turned into a hucksters' playground (as they have been in America ever since Rosser Reeves rode to Eisenhower's rescue in 1952). But the record of what is now over a quarter of a century of TV political broadcasting in Britain does not suggest to me (I write, admittedly, before Saatchi & Saatchi have shown their paces) that that is the moral to draw, or even the danger to be feared. The most effective television political broadcasts, reaching back now through a total of eight elections, have always been those that were also good journalism; not objective, not 'responsible', of course biased and sometimes, no doubt, tendentious. Yet as such, or so it seems to me, election broadcasts can only fully succeed—as all good journalism succeeds—when they manage to detect and crystallise some aspect of the public mood that is already half there but has not yet been fully expressed. And there is surely nothing for any democrat to be afraid of in that.



For Labour, in 1951, Sir Hartley Shawcross and Christopher Mayhew did 'a kind of cosy double-act'

a filmed minute or two from a very ageing Attlee—deserved to be counted in any way a success; and that was a success won very much against the odds, since it had been put together in the worst conditions possible: in an antiquated BBC studio in Manchester (connected by a GPO landline to London) in which Her Majesty's Leader of the Opposition had to fit in as best he could between the competing demands of 'Sooty the Bear' on children's television and the studio requirements of a local *Question Time* election programme. Certainly no one present that afternoon in the converted nonconformist chapel that served as a BBC studio in Dickenson Road, Ardwick, could have been left in any doubt as to how deeply the amateur tradition is ingrained in British politics.

And in the Liberal Party, of course, it has always tended to find its apotheosis. Yet, at least in television terms, the Liberals have from 1964 onwards consistently had a way of making amateurism seem attractive; their broadcasts may be run on a shoestring (in 1964 their three broadcasts are said to have cost them just £320) but they even then

across; while the Conservatives, with Iain Macleod rehabilitated and back in charge, got rid of their own advertising men and TV professionals and left even the presentation of their new leader, Ted Heath, to BBC staff producers. The results may have been workmanlike rather than enterprising—but to many electors it was probably a relief to discover that, for the time being anyway, the marketing men had been repulsed.

More sadly, there remained the retreat in the other, and much more legitimate, area of straightforward, simple television journalism—where the Labour Party's 1959 broadcasts still set the standards of achievement. In 1970, however, it was the Conservatives' turn to show how this particular frontier could be pushed forward. Once again the trick proved to be a derivative one—this time from ITN's *News at Ten*⁵. Using two TV professionals as newscasters, Geoffrey Johnson Smith and Christopher Chataway, the Conservatives were faithful to

⁵ The rip-off technique is not an infallible recipe for success. The Labour Party's effort in May 1977 to crib the formula of Granada TV's *What the Papers Say* was, for instance, an embarrassing failure.

ERMANNO OLMI:

This year's Cannes Festival ended in triumph for Ermanno Olmi, whose *L'Albero degli Zoccoli* (*The Tree of Wooden Clogs*) swept not only the official grand prix but also the top awards from several other juries. That, coupled with as close as possible to favourable unanimity among the critics, may perhaps launch Olmi into an international prominence which, by and large, has so far eluded him.

Surely this is a case of poetic (or, one might better say, mystic) justice at work, for Olmi's Cannes victory came one year, almost to the day, after Roberto Rossellini's death. Who can forget the apt scenario of the film patriarch's demise—Rossellini, President of the official Cannes Jury, using his position to continue his thirty-year battle against the cinema's abdication of moral and social responsibility, heading a seminar precisely on 'Film and Responsibility' right there at Cannes, the very symbol of contemporary film's vitality and meaninglessness. One week after the Festival the world would hear of Rossellini's death, following a heart attack occasioned, no doubt, by the excessive exertion of the previous weeks. Was this in itself to be a symbol of the futility of his struggle, especially given the present state of world cinema? It would seem not. Olmi's unexpected triumph this year points dramatically to the continuing vigour of a certain idealism in the cinema. One might be tempted to see in it a modest victory for the Rossellini film ethic: 'the late 70s resurgence of neo-realism' or 'the reincarnation of a cinema firmly rooted in belief and hope in human dignity and responsibility.' Be that as it may, Cannes should at least publicise as never before the talent of one of the world's major film directors.

HUMANISM IN THE CINEMA

Marc Gervais

Olmi has of course enjoyed a good deal of solid recognition, dating as far back as his second and third (and still best known) features, *Il Posto* and *I Fidanzati*, in the early 1960s. He has long had his admirers in Italy and France, and above all perhaps in Britain, and *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* should significantly increase their number. For sheer breadth and poetic beauty, it represents the finest work he has yet achieved. It marks, however, no departure whatever from the essential concerns of his art. But more than that, Olmi's films, and the director himself, represent a phenomenon that is not only rare but, one is tempted to assert, unique in

'The Tree of Wooden Clogs': the gateway of the farm near Bergamo



the western world, a phenomenon fascinating to explore from a number of perspectives, whether in terms of Italian film, general Italian culture, Italian politics/ideology/religion, or in terms of world film production and marketing patterns. From a more strictly cinematic point of view, his films furnish ideal subject matter for what is at the heart of film research today, as exemplified in the universities and certain film journals: questions centred on the nature of film language, media consciousness and aesthetics.

One can go further. In a world where, by and large, the media have the status of kept lady for whatever ideology or economic system or power élite is dominant in whatever country, and where, consequently, the marginals become shrill, desperate, violent or cynical, Olmi goes on making films which breathe a spirit of awareness, responsibility, dignity, freedom and hope—big words indeed. And one's own self-consciousness in using them is proof enough of the cynicism deeply embedded in film circles, of the resigned acceptance of a desperate *status quo* which is the very antithesis of everything that Olmi stands for.



But to begin at the beginning. Since he is still not very widely known, almost every article written about Olmi repeats the data considered basic: for example, his peasant roots, the fact that his father was an anti-Fascist railway worker (sacked by the Fascists) and that young Ermanno and his mother worked for years at the Edison Company in Milan. Olmi's deeply lived Catholicism, in contrast to the more or less lapsed Catholicism (*qua* cultural heritage still more or less operative) of certain other renowned Italian directors, is equally often cited. Such considerations need explaining and nuancing, to be sure; but they do help in understanding, for example, why when Olmi embarks on a historical movie he ends up making *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, whereas a Bertolucci, say, creates a 1900.

Olmi interrupted his studies to work at Edison, but that did not prevent him from becoming involved in theatre. He began making industrial documentaries for the Edison Company; and although few people have seen the full range of this work, it is known that from 1953 to 1961 he made some forty of these films. In 1959, one such documentary expanded into a fiction feature, *Time Stood Still*. There followed *Il Posto* (1961) and *I Fidanziati* (1963), produced by small, independent, Milan-based co-ops with the delightful names 'The 24 Horses' and '22 December'. Olmi's only film with professional actors, *A Man Named John*, followed in 1965, produced surprisingly enough by Harry Saltzman and starring Rod Steiger. The film, a biography of Pope John XXIII, was not successful, and it marks the end, at least for some dozen years, of Olmi's modest climb towards international renown. Henceforth he would actually recede into relative obscurity, in terms at least of international reputation and access to his work, in direct contrast to a number of Italian directors who would achieve a kind of superstar pop status (among the upper echelons of mid-cult), to be joined later by Pasolini, then Bertolucci and Wertmüller.

After 1965, Olmi turned more and more to

Italian television as a source of finance. As a matter of fact, since 1965 his work has been wholly supported by Italian government-financed agencies—RAI for television and Italnoleggio Cinematografico for film. Thus in 1969 Italnoleggio financed *One Fine Day* and RAI backed *The Scavengers*. RAI went on to commission *During the Summer* in 1971; and were to join Italnoleggio in co-producing both *The Circumstance* (1973) and *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* (1978). Olmi's record of feature films now stands at nine; there have also, since 1964, been many television documentaries.

The fascinating aspect to all this is that Olmi emerges as a major film artist who in no way plays the game imposed by the West's feature film production and exhibition way of life. While others struggle to maintain their integrity within the system, with greater or lesser success, Olmi goes on working in tranquillity and freedom, totally supported by the Italian state. Given the economics of the system, his forgoing of star status, and perhaps even his habit of working with relatively minimal budgets, means that no major is likely to be remotely interested in distributing his films.

But the films are distributed none the less. Italnoleggio has some three dozen cinemas scattered throughout Italy, a para-commercial culture circuit that eagerly pounces on every Olmi film. And RAI brings Olmi's movies into every Italian home. Film clubs, church basements and cultural centres furnish other outlets, ensuring that his films are constantly on the move. On the international scene, the films tend to be invited to festivals and to garner prestigious if somewhat esoteric awards. Once in a while, an Olmi movie is bought by an idealistic foreign distributor; or his work may become the subject of a serious retrospective, such as that held in London at the National Film Theatre in December/January of 1974/75. The end result is clear: in his own modest fashion, quite content to pay the price in order to make his films as he wishes to make them, Olmi thrives.

The achievement is his. But it is made possible only by the enlightened attitude of the Italian state's cultural policy. While the economics of commercial films fluctuate madly, and under the pressures of the mass marketing system the Italian cinema panders to the lowest common cultural denominator via the usual gratuitous violence, pornography, sensationalism and sentimentality, with everything that contributes to reducing film to an alienating commodity product, the state sees to it that certain enlightened films are allowed to be both made and seen. In other words, given the viewing patterns and industry economics now determining film-making all over the world, films such as Olmi's could not exist without special nurturing. That they do exist indicates that the Italian state believes film to be a viable form of culture, deserving the same financial assistance as the other arts. Other countries in the West seem to agree with all this in theory. The practice is something else. They would be well advised to study the Italian example.

'I know, I know, for some time now I have been fed by the State, by television, by some kind soul of a foreign distributor, a crumb here, a crumb there, making films that cost very little, sometimes myself acting as one of the stage-hands—that's how it is possible for me to go on making films.' These words of

Olmi's (from an interview published by *Positif* in 1976) assuredly do not resound with the ring of a revolutionary manifesto. Yet they represent a radical contestation against everything in and about film as practised today in the Western world. There are many who shout louder for revolution but who are readily recuperated by the system, ultimately adopting its values. Olmi's revolution is real.



'Sometimes myself acting as one of the stage-hands...' Olmi is dramatising the fact that he makes his films cheaply, but of course the implications spill out into nothing less than a deliberate method and, ultimately, a general conception about film-making. Olmi's film practice is unique among today's feature directors, and as such merits careful consideration. Such consideration, however, leads inevitably into more abstract areas of discussion, among them the interweaving notions of auteurism and neo-realism; but more, into the very centre of the critical battle surrounding all such notions.

The Tree of Wooden Clogs was both written and directed by Olmi. That in itself is not unusual, in an era that still boasts a number of *bona fide* film auteurs. What is more surprising is that Olmi also both shot and edited his own film—no minor achievement, given the grandeur and scale of this three-hour epic. In fact, and to a remarkable degree, all Olmi's features bear the stamp of his personal craftsmanship. After *Il Posto*, he took over cinematography and editing for his ensuing features, though now and again he has listed some of his friends under these categories in the official credits. The story ideas are generally his own as well, although at the stage of the final screenplay Olmi sometimes works in collaboration with other writers. The one-man creative process is further extended by his use of non-professional actors. Although Olmi insists that the 'real' people in his films contribute to them enormously, it is at the level of their own experience, their lived reality, and certainly not through professional craft or pre-existing expectations of a film *persona*. The final shaping, the artistic integration is wholly Olmi's.

All of which would seem to earn for Olmi the accolade of auteur, at least at the level of film *artisan*. Given the complexity of feature film-making, the extent to which any movie can be attributed to one man's creativity must remain in question. With the studies being undertaken, on the one hand, of the work of some of Hollywood's great scriptwriters, cameramen, designers, producers, etc., and on the other of film genres and general cultural influences, the immensely enriching auteur theory will continue to be seriously challenged. But surely Olmi, if anyone, can lay claims to personal authorship. At the tactile, actual film-making level, he enjoys a measure of control scarcely matched by any other major feature director at work today, with the possible exception of Satyajit Ray (and, within his totally different lab-research context, of Jean-Luc Godard in his later phase).

At any rate, the image of the craftsman working in relative quiet and independence is peculiarly apt in describing Olmi. He avoids Rome and Cinecittà with determination. Television and film commitments and his



'The Tree of Wooden Clogs': 'I have not invited the peasants to court . . . I have simply come back to my own people'

involvement in Italian cultural life demand that some of his business must be transacted in a major centre; and that has always been, as far as possible, Milan. His films are habitually shot on location. When not engaged in that phase of the film process, the 44-year-old Olmi lives quietly with his wife and three children in a village called Asiago, not many miles from Venice. There he develops his ideas and his scripts; and there, too, he edits the film in his own lab, at home. The financial corollary: *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* cost \$450,000, a minuscule sum when compared with what other directors would spend on a three-hour film. Even that, however, is a far cry from 'the good old early days'. Olmi's first critical success, *Il Posto*, cost all of \$15,000.



Personal control and low budgets are one thing. But more than that, Olmi's method of making films testifies to a series of consistent and deliberate aesthetic choices. Even a cursory analysis of his films reveals how far they correspond to a classic understanding of neo-realism as practised in its early great period. The cheap production methods, location shooting and use of non-professional players are of course part of it. But there is a more fundamental and essential notion that points the link: Olmi's remarkable respect for the time/space continuum.

In *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, the film reality has the look and feeling of 'real reality'. Olmi's camera captures the landscape, objects and people as they are, sacrificing fancy camera angles, focal distor-

tion and false spatial relationships. He is quite aware of this, and his care for the 'objective representation' of reality extends to his use of light and colour. 'In *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* I used two kinds of lighting: sunlight, or rather the light of the seasons, and light coming from candles and petrol lamps . . . I avoided all pictorial references, and I depended entirely on natural light, reinforcing it only when it was impossible to do otherwise. And this, so as not to fall back on the conventional palette of colour films on the 19th century. I gave added colour to nothing, I avoided tinted backgrounds, I didn't whiten the walls. One "sees" the colours because they actually belong to the objects, the costumes, the people . . . The fact is that the tricks we have become used to in representational works have made us forget their direct connection with real events and things. The cinema, like so many other cultural manifestations of the present day, has become a sort of temple within which we sing hymns to life, but from which life has been excluded, relegated out of doors.'

Olmi goes on to contrast his own work with that of one of the masters he respects, Luchino Visconti. He feels that even in his neo-realist classic *La Terra Trema*, Visconti first composed his tableaux, as it were, according to his own cultured, aristocratic canons, and then brought his peasants into the pre-existing fabrication. 'I have another culture,' Olmi adds, 'I belong to another world. I have not invited the peasants to court . . . I have simply come back to my own people, I have brought them to the screen, just as I have brought myself to the screen . . . by describing a peasant culture which is,

finally, my own.'

As with space, so with time. *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* is totally denuded of time-distorting dramatic effects, chopped up montages and contrived suspense. One episode seems merely to follow another with apparent effortlessness, as if at random, and within each episode the event takes its time, almost literally. Inevitably time is altered by functional editing, and is of necessity telescoped. But in Olmi's film the effect of real time is sustained: one has the feeling of watching something unfold 'naturally', without being hustled, packaged, teased, overwhelmed, or manipulated this way or that. This very quality of seeming effortlessness is a testimonial of sorts to Olmi's maturing film mastery. *I Fidanziati*, for example, seemed somewhat contrived in its novel-like playing with time and levels of reality; and *A Man Named John* was defeated by, among other things, its own unabsorbed complexity. But Olmi's new film seems to be simplicity itself, telling a story that has scarcely any plot, meandering about as in 'real life'.

All this, of course, is a matter of convention, and Olmi's films are in fact as carefully structured as the most precisely plotted of Hollywood film stories. He speaks about improvisation, comparing his filming with the process of playing jazz; but, he adds, he has already furnished the themes, he sets the parameters. As long as there is fiction there is plot, it would seem. There are, however, different kinds of plotting. On the one hand, the cinema has as one of its chief glories the masterful constructions of a Hitchcock, where intricate plot effect becomes an essential part of the manipulative

rhetoric—and of the audience's delight. But there is another pole of film-making, which plays plotting down as much as possible: Zavattini will ever strive to observe that woman buying shoes, and Godard (in the 60s) will attempt to capture life as experienced 'between the actions', between drama's traditional high points.

Olmi's cinema, from the very beginning, has been of the kind that avoids the dramatic highlights. To put it another way: in *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* 'nothing happens'—nothing, that is, except birth, struggle, joy, love, hate, marriage, sacrifice, death and the like. Olmi does not structure his film along our movie expectations; but although he forsakes the whole bag of tricks that make up the rhetoric of the well-made plot, things do happen, a story does evolve, as we are made to share in a certain world, a certain moment in history. There is a farm in the Bergamo region at the turn of the century, with the fields, the yard, the animals, the peasants' quarters, the landowner's house. Within this little world are four or five families of peasants, the priest, the village idiot, the overseer, the landowner, itinerants and traders, the village nearby and, briefly, Milan. The film moves to the rhythms of sun and rain, work and rest, day and night, and the seasons. From this organic unity, individuals emerge, characters grow, events take shape.

There are no 'big' moments. Olmi is far more interested, for example, in an old man and his little granddaughter growing their tomatoes, or in a widow coping with her sick cow, than he is in climactic battles and confrontations. In this sense he captures the moments 'in between', in a de-dramatised structure that is none the less the fruit of a most complex set of interweaving 'little plots'. World box-office reaction is predictable. What with the years of conditioning that have produced the mass audience with its insatiable desire for well-made action plots, Olmi's kind of cinema is hard put to survive. And yet, the end result for those willing to experience his films is of a far superior order. This cinema is immersed in life. One feels he has been touched by reality.



That, at least, could be the claim advanced in favour of a film such as *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, a claim which has a familiar ring to it, based as it is on one of the corner-stones of the neo-realist aesthetic: 'the direct connection with real events and things' (to repeat Olmi's own words) 'without excluding life.' Indeed, accurate as far as it has gone, my description of the film finds its models and source of inspiration in some of the writings of neo-realism's most brilliant proponents and theorists of the 50s, the French school of Bazin, Agel and Ayffre. It is, however, precisely this aesthetic, or rather this understanding of an aesthetic, that has been under severe critical attack these last dozen years by the proponents of another approach, based on an entirely different set of metaphysical, epistemological and ideological premises.

The adherents of this more recent 'school'—there is, of course, no single school, and they are clustered very loosely in Paris around Christian Metz, in Britain around the Educational Advisory Service of the BFI, and around the world generally in the film

education sections of universities, as well as in journals such as *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Screen*—are categorical in their belief that the only valid approach to understanding reality must be 'materialistic' and 'scientific'. And so for film as well. Film is nothing but a structuring of signs. Its analysis is best based on insights and methods garnered from what is generally a loose mixture of three systematic 'materialistic sciences' claimed to be the most relevant today: semiology/structuralism, Marxism and psychoanalysis. In this view, any claims about a film 'representing reality', be they put forward in favour of *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* or of neo-realist films in general, are sheer nonsense. Early Rossellini and De Sica, or late Olmi for that matter, are not representing reality. They are using a convention of 'realism', using realistic signs to create artificial works that disseminate their own personal vision. Their cinema is anything but a 'window on reality'. The 'transparency' of the cinema (championed by Bazin, etc.) is a dangerous myth, a pretence of communicating the real world in film, whereas in fact, under the guise of objectivity, a vision of life is being propounded, a philosophy variously described as 'idealist', 'immanentist', 'mystical', 'religious' and/or 'humanist'. Needless to add that these terms are hardly used in a complimentary sense, being equated to a vague, wishful-thinking mystification or, worse still, to a cover-up for bourgeois ideology.

Indeed, if one takes literally some of the 'pro-realism' utterances of Rossellini, Zavattini and others, the critical attack is not without merit. It is, however, relatively easy to show that Rossellini never limited himself to the naive notion that his films were in any way open windows on reality. It is equally clear that the early neo-realist films were far more complex than the straight representations of reality that some may have claimed them to be. That, however, is another question, though it is extremely pertinent to any discussion of Olmi's work.

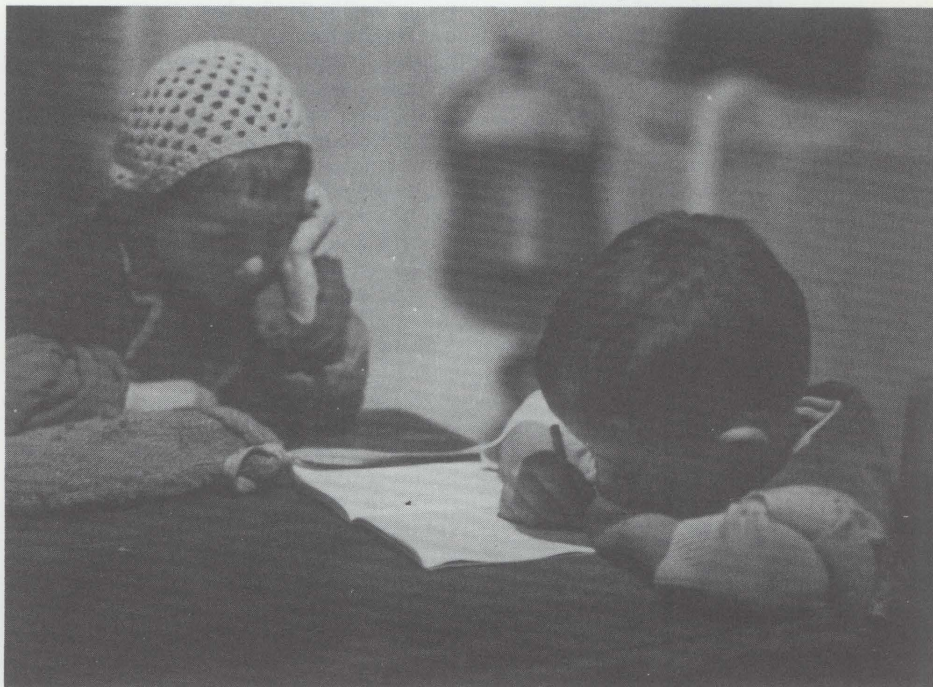
But to return to *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*. There is a whole dimension to the film that has not yet been alluded to here. And it is the

combination of this dimension with the neo-realist current that not only invalidates the kind of criticism just mentioned, but also gives the work its complexity, situating it quite consciously within the contemporary or 'modern' sensibility. We are now speaking of a 1970s kind of neo-realism, or a post-neo-realism.

There is no denying, for reasons already outlined, that the informed viewer spontaneously believes in the people, the whole reality within the film as it is set before him—the diegetical context of the film, as the semiologists would say. But this kind of belief is dialectically countered by another sort of awareness: that what he is experiencing is a work of sheer artistic beauty. Indeed, *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* is a three-hour succession of shimmering, moving tableaux, art consciously glorying in its own resplendence as art. The paradox: while remaining true to the tenets of realism, Olmi makes the viewer continually conscious of his own role as contemplator of artistic beauty. The exquisite though 'natural' framing, the masterful use of natural light, the slow, respect-filled pacing achieved by the editing—all combine to make of the film a veritable liturgy, a sort of sacred artistic ritual of the land, the peasants, the past and life.

To use Peter Wollen's splendid application to film of Peirce's threefold division of the sign: Olmi never forsakes the indexical character of his sign (in its obvious, quasi-ontological tie-in with reality), and yet he continually transposes it to the iconic level (wherein the sign becomes the obvious artistic re-creating, based on resemblance). The result is not lost on the viewer, who thereby enters into a complex relationship with Olmi. And this becomes part of the aesthetic delight. The viewer sees a recognisable reality on the screen, but it is definitely Olmi's vision and his artistic rendition of that reality, with all kinds of personal, emotional, cultural overtones. Inevitably there results that openness of communication so much sought after by those championing a responsible attitude for the media. The shared consciousness of 'spectacle' or 'art as created by the artist'

'The Tree of Wooden Clogs': in the farmhouse kitchen, the hard-won pursuit of education



implies a respect for the viewer's freedom and intelligence, and the subtlety and complexity of the experience is a call to more active, creative participation. At the very level of the film language utilised, then, Olmi's work witnesses to a peculiarly modern complexity of consciousness; and it is through this language that he communicates a similarly complex, individual vision.



Complexity of language and complexity of vision—these are abstract concepts, whereas *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* is a movie, a work filled with sights and sounds, feelings and ideas, characters, places and story. A closer description, then, of some aspects of this 'ritual of the land, the peasants, the past and life' may help in understanding how language and vision come together in more concrete form to create this film.

Aito Makinen, the Finnish critic, sees *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* as in part a re-creation of the Garden of Eden before the Fall—an Eden, to be sure, which is part of the cultural heritage of two thousand years of Christianity, and which is treated as such in the film. That, surely, is as good an entry as any into *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*. For the film is rich in biblical overtones, to such an extent that it is difficult to recall another feature using as many obvious Christian symbols. The peasants' lives are lived to the rhythm of church bells wafting over the countryside. The people greet one another with prayerful salutations; and they face life's varied moments guided by explicitly stated religious principles. There are chapels and churches, crosses and holy pictures. The priest himself, very earthy and convincing, is none the less a moving icon, part of a cultural reality that breathes years of accumulated religious connotations.

Above all, the peasants are framed within a landscape that shimmers with religious meaning. The long-held close-ups of silent faces reflecting and feeling add an inner dimension to the same kind of reality. There is a fundamental at-one-ness between the peasants, the land and meaningful religion which Olmi obviously sees as eminently desirable. In this sense, the film is an evocation of Eden. But, one must repeat, Eden seen as an evocation of the past, of a way of life that has been lost, or rather a memory of that way of life.

So there is an aesthetic distancing achieved by this iconic, overtly aesthetic dimension of the film. Adding to this distancing is a kind of ironic, contemporary awareness, sometimes tinged with humour. The peasants, for one thing, are anything but perfect. Olmi makes us share his belief in the human beauty and richness of their lives; but he also makes us see the naiveté, the unquestioning simplicity that cannot be shared by the contemporary film viewer. We observe the peasants as ignorant, and to some degree as helpless in the face of a social structuring beyond not only their comprehension but their very consciousness. Their lives, however meaningful, are exceedingly difficult and precarious, totally dependent on the landowner. Indeed, the little community is tragically broken up in the end by the ruthlessness of the proprietor.

Without preaching, then, *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* becomes in a very real sense a



'The Tree of Wooden Clogs': Lucia Pezzoli as Maddalena, the peasant bride

cry against the effects of an unjust social order, reflecting thereby a consciousness (Olmi's) perfectly attuned, at least on this point, to the insights of Marxism. Olmi goes further. He widens the context of the film to include a definite historical perspective. The young couple's honeymoon trip to Milan enriches the film on many counts, one of which is to situate it in historical time and geographical space. The farm is part of a larger Italian scene where things are happening: riots, political speeches, troops, violence. Our two young people, of course, have absolutely no comprehension of what is going on. But the film has, the film as created by Olmi and understood by the viewer. 'And one day, the peasants on the farm may share in that comprehension...' one may well reflect, after the movie and with eighty years of historical hindsight.

A blueprint for social awareness, an endorsement of the movement of the masses? Not quite—and here is further evidence of the subtlety of Olmi's thought. For the Milan episode does not only situate the film in history. Olmi has the young couple spend their first night in a convent home for orphans, where the girl's aunt is Superior. The nuptial love scene is handled, as one might expect, with exquisite tenderness, discretion and reverence. Next morning, the nun persuades the couple to take one of the homeless infants back to the farm with them—in the process, stating with bald simplicity the mystique of Christian marriage, love and responsibility. Olmi pulls no punches; and the whole scene becomes rather sublime. His daring, in the face of contemporary conventions and notions surrounding sexuality, marriage and the like, is to say the least, not lacking. What he has done is to shift

the focus from class riots and social upheaval to individual acts of love and giving. The ideological implications are obvious, revealing yet another facet of Olmi's complex awareness and ultimate options.



Olmi's social concern cannot but meet with the approval of the Italian Marxists. But it is, as one might expect, an approval tinged with restraint and suspicion. The man is admired for his exemplary refusal to be part of the film system; and his films are admired too, for reasons by now obvious. There is, however, a definite cleavage. At one level, in the context of Italian life, it might seem obvious: Marxist ideology versus Catholicism. But in terms of film, the problem is perhaps not so evident. An understanding of the essential difference might go some way in helping to understand what, at the most fundamental level, is the wellspring of Olmi's art. What is it that makes an Olmi film essentially what it is?

One of the Italian Communist critics at Cannes was praising Olmi for his new film, but criticising him for not going far enough in creating the proper historical context. At the very time of *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, in Milan, there were the beginnings of the co-operative movement (the 'white co-ops'), of hospital reforms, of concerted strike action, and of various other social manifestations which Olmi's peasants totally ignore. In other (semiological) words, the broadening out of the film's diegesis on to historical significance was too timid.

Olmi's answer at the press conference was almost (and untypically) aggressive. He chided the ideologues for their persistence in rewriting history from their contemporary fixed attitudes. In point of fact, there were no social/political movements on the farms of that region of Italy at the turn of the century. In some of the cities, true, there were the beginnings; but for the peasants that was another world entirely, something still far off. And that the film depicted with historical accuracy. But the film showed more: it showed how the peasants were living a true community life more intense than anything experienced today, something which we might well strive to emulate in our own social structures and daily living patterns. So at least Olmi said.

The objection and the answer were of course merely the tip of the iceberg, hinting at much deeper divergences of view and showing once again how aesthetics, ideology and philosophy are inextricably intertwined. For it is not merely a question of the interpretation of history, or of the inclusion or non-inclusion of certain historical events as part of the plot. At the deepest level, the divergence resides in the very texture and structure of the film, call it (once again) the use of film language or the understanding of the nature of the film sign.

That usage and understanding vary according to one's understanding of the universe: it is as simple as that. For the adherents of dialectical materialism, the world has within itself no meaning, no order; and terms such as 'mystery' or 'spirit' are just so much mystification. One brings meaning, idea, order to the world; and in the Marxist/Leninist scheme, that means the correct understanding of history, with the consequent ideology and political practice.

As for the cinema, the cinematographic sign must reflect this kind of understanding. The artist already has the Idea—in this instance, the correct one as propounded by Marx/Lenin—which will guide him in ordering the materials, structuring the signs, to bring meaning, the already existing truth, to his film. Thus the 'people' and 'events' in a film are ciphers, very often nothing more than obviously artificial symbols to be twisted one way or another in the shaping of the thesis.

Even if he shares the Marxist concern, Olmi belongs to a world view that is radically opposed to this understanding. Briefly—and to pursue the style of semi-caricature in the name of clarity—his is a spiritual conception of the universe. In Olmi's Christian tradition, the world is seen as charged with mystery which is, ultimately, a benign presence. Within that presence is to be found meaning; and out of this springs the beauty of the universe, but also the moral order, human ideals, family life, the whole complex of existence. Art, at its most exalted, seeks to find this mystery, this presence, and to communicate it in its own unique way.

All of which is theoretical and abstract. But when translated to film practice, the results become obviously discernible. For example, in 1900 Bertolucci explodes with aesthetic exuberance. His aestheticism, however, is uneasily contained within what one might be tempted to term a not very convincing Marxist framework. Most of the time, the peasants in 1900 are totally unconvincing, at least at the level of recognisable surface reality. They are there because they are necessary to the thesis and they perform accordingly; at the prescribed times, they actually dance to a Marxist/Leninist tune. Olmi's peasants, on the other hand, exist before the film. Neither Marx nor, for that matter, Freud calls the tune for their dance. They are listening to another music, an inner, spiritual one.

It is in the light of such considerations that Olmi's choices, his use of cinematographic signs, find their full significance. People, things, landscapes, sounds—all the signs—are respected, undistorted, because in them in their pre-filmic state (i.e. before they are photographed and recorded) there already is a meaning, a presence or mystery. And so Olmi's camera and recorder take the time to contemplate, to listen. Those long-held close-ups of faces peering and listening are not merely a stylistic trait. They are highly relevant to this kind of enterprise. Those moments 'in between' when 'nothing is happening' are in point of fact privileged, pregnant with the possibility of experiencing the real, of becoming attuned (as they say). Work, too, is all important. Olmi spends more time with people at work than any other major director, and this is because work has its mysterious significance as well, its presence of spirit.



One is tempted to draw parallels here with Bresson. Indeed, the films of both directors are structured on this kind of mysterious expectancy, this seeking to see and hear. The great difference, however, is that Bresson (the 'Jansenist') sees the physical world as somehow inimical to the spirit; and hence his films, in their austerity of texture, ruthlessly pare away the 'non-essentials'. Olmi (the 'Franciscan') embraces the material: the

earth, human love, work, science—all are charged for him with positive spiritual meaning. But the Olmi films, for all their ultimate hopefulness, are steeped in the experience of the '*difficulté d'être*'. Human beings and human society can become alienated, losing the sense of belonging. And so, to be attuned, one must endure a painful process. The peasants in *The Tree of Wooden Clogs* are in a very real sense outsiders—as, indeed, are all the characters in Olmi's films.

The watchman in the Alps (*Time Stood Still*), the Milanese office boy (*Il Posto*), the welder in Milan and Sicily (*I Fidanzati*), the advertising executive (*One Fine Day*), the debris hunters (*The Scavengers*), the disreputable 'professore' (*During the Summer*) and the Milanese upper middle class family (*The Circumstance*) are 'special', somewhat excluded, because to pause, to turn within oneself, seriously to contemplate reality, means, in Olmi's view, to be unable to play the game imposed by contemporary life in its subjugation to a stultifying materialism, whether the rules of the game are determined by the bourgeois or by the Marxist establishments. In some of the films (*One Fine Day*, for instance), the Olmi vision darkens perceptibly. The alienation all but takes over as the dominant tone, and we feel the loneliness, the absurdity, the sense of being lost. Olmi's irony and pain are more evident, and he becomes more typical of the 'contemporary sensibility'. Essentially, however, his characters break through to an authentic inner freedom. The experience brings insight, they progress. They must none the less be willing to pay the price, to be in some manner or other outside the alienated mainstream.

All of which must surely give the impression that Olmi's films are heavy and dreary, text books to be studied rather than movies to be enjoyed. Nothing could be further from the truth. The adventure has another surface, one of gentle, wry humour, wit and intelligence. Olmi is a keen observer, and part of the fun of watching his films consists in catching on to the subtle details, the poking of fun at the characters and

perhaps at the director's own beliefs. His movies delight in their overall awareness, which awareness is a big factor in the openness of the creative discourse. Self-conscious art communicating personal conviction in an honest and open manner has a special, mature appeal.

But beneath the surface, it is worth repeating, is the other adventure, whose magnitude encompasses one of the fundamental ways of relating to existence; and not least among the merits of Olmi's art, especially as most beautifully fulfilled in *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*, is that it inevitably leads into that dimension. In seeking an understanding of his work, therefore, one can no more ignore that dimension than one can abstract, say, from Eisenstein's ideological context while trying to come to grips with his films. Great dynamic currents of present-day film research are not therefore terribly suited to the exploration of Olmi's art, because their methodologies deny the very validity of his basic insight and point of departure. Olmi the outsider again.

In terms of the contemporary Italian film scene, the same story is repeated. Olmi's path is untrodden by others not only because of his independent methods, but also because he seems to operate from a different way of relating to life. His quiet way has little in common with the aggressive, strident and often semi-neurotic creations of present-day Fellini or, especially, of Wertmüller, Bertolucci, Ferreri, etc. His hopefulness and idealism seem far removed from the self-absorbed pain and cynicism, or even from the stately alienation of an Antonioni. It is, in truth, to the early Rossellini and De Sica that one must turn to find a spiritual link. But from the broader view, one can range much further back: the long tradition of western humanism has bred and nourished Ermanno Olmi. In his own modern, modest way he reasserts what has been richest in western culture: the transcendent value of the individual, the quest for human dignity and fulfilment, the faith in the possibility of its attainment. ■

'The Tree of Wooden Clogs': the honeymoon couple on their trip to Milan





Above: 'How the Myth Was Made': Maggie Dirrane, heroine of 'Man of Aran' and now 78, as she appears in George Stoney's film. Below: in 'The People's Land' the Eskimos of Pond Inlet 'used the opportunity of having a film made about them to state their views'



MORE ETHNIC THAN GRAPHIC, AND OFTEN REMARKABLY LONG

It was Flaherty night at the Canberra Ethnographic Film Conference and the room was quite respectably filled. *Man of Aran* was to be shown, along with George Stoney's film about the film, *How the Myth Was Made*, and on a congenially retrospective occasion like this I suppose very few of us were expecting controversy—but how wrong we were. Hardly had the title *Man of Aran* faded from the screen than a strong-lunged slogan shouter in the audience made the voice of egalitarian justice loudly heard: 'What about woman?'

What indeed? Yet although the protest sounded somewhat premature, it soon took on a surprisingly real urgency as Maggie Dirrane slipped on the rocks and had to struggle, not only to save herself from the sea, but from the exactions of a director all too clearly determined to make danger look really dangerous. 'She was screaming her goddam head off,' the hearty Harry Watt told us a little later, adding insult to injury as he remembered the event. And while this unfeeling remark did little to reduce the inflammation in one part of the audience, it did help us to understand why our attitudes toward *Man of Aran*—everyone's attitudes—must always be somewhat uneasy. There was plainly a large difference between Nanook's predicament, almost starving to death in the course of a bear hunt which he himself had asked to have filmed, and Maggie's escape from the sea.

Watt's robust and jokey presence adds a good deal to the appeal of George Stoney's *Man of Aran: How the Myth Was Made*, a one-hour attempt to find out why Flaherty 'worked the way he did, and what were the consequences when life becomes myth.' Low-keyed, engaging, with the consciously straightforward conventionality of a work which might have been designed for Flaherty's Film Society devotees, it includes a sequence in which all sorts of relics are pulled out from under the roof of Flaherty's old cottage—shell necklaces from the South Seas left over from *Moana*; large racks for developing the negative; bric-à-brac left in an attic unvisited for years.

And that, a young man in the audience brusquely told us later, is precisely where the whole kit and caboodle belonged—Flaherty, his films and his fans. Perhaps such an opinion was only to be expected at a gathering which included a very mixed bag of

people brought bewilderingly together under one roof—anthropologists and unanthropologists, social workers and social shirkers, poets and revolutionaries, Black and White and Brown. And perhaps it did no more than underline the fact that for much of the younger generation the past is dead, as counsellor, guide and friend.

Yet in the setting of an Ethnographic Film Conference it was an opinion which sounded both harsh and out of place. For surely no other branch of documentary has demonstrated such a consistently respectful sense of the past. In one ethnographic film after another the past has been made 'present' in a variety of historical forms: the romantic history of nostalgia and romance; the literal history of archival records and deep-frozen nitrate reels. And more recently (now that the tables have been turned and both the writing of history, and the cameras, are passing into the hands of those who were merely written

about before) we have seen the rise of retributive history—radical reinterpretations of What Really Happened by those 'it happened to, comprehensive indictments of this oppressor or that.

Two films shown at the Conference were of this kind. *Protected* re-enacts a strike by Aborigines about twenty years ago on what has for years been one of the most notorious Queensland reserves, Palm Island. *We Stop Here* has Queensland Aborigines talking about poisonings, murder and dispossession, which took place within the last forty years. Their soft voices and ironic humour give this so nearly contemporary narrative the tone and shape of legend—a legend of holocaust set against green images of forest peace, scenes of the rain forest where the Aborigines now live. Perhaps it's a small thing, yet the quiet speaking of unspeakable acts, of voices coming to us across the sunlit dark water of forest streams (lately incarnadined, with all the memories of time and cleansing such imagery summons) represented a notable improvement on what we have come to expect. (Compare the usual TV routine. Voice Over: 'At Myall Creek, the scene of a notorious massacre . . . ' Picture: Rude etchings of ruder pioneers, guns pointing, stick-like figures of dead Blacks scattered like charred kindling and barely recognisable as anything more . . . Not forgetting the rattle of 'musket effects'.)

Admittedly, there is nothing special about retributive history on the screen. A fair amount of Third World cinema (including some of Ousmane Sembene's early work) might be classified as such. The politics are the politics of pure oppression. The arguments, subtle as an axe. Furthermore, most of the works in the genre are the egregious verdicts of the victors, and the further the participants in these re-enactments are from the historic occasions they re-enact, the more egregious these verdicts appear to be. The Chinese, one suspects, will still be making little horror shows about wicked landlords long after the last landlord is dust.

But the interesting thing about *Protected* (especially interesting since those of us who make ethnographic films have often spoken of the need for greater participation on the part of the communities we make our films about) is that the Aborigines on Palm Island who do the acting were emotionally still very close to the strike they re-enacted, and they appear to have been so stirred and excited by the process of re-living their own history (according to film-makers Alessandro Cavadini and Caroline Strachan) that past and present became fused, histrionically, into one.

Both films were exceptions. They could hardly have been less representative of the Conference as a whole, where most emphasis was placed on the familiar opposition of 'observational' and 'interpretative' approaches—or, in another widely accepted terminology, 'open' and 'closed' films. *Observational* films present evidence which is open for all to see (so runs the doctrine), and it is clear enough why historical treatments look rather eccentric in such company. The evidence of history is at best contentious; at worst, mere myth. For this reason observational film-makers like myself have invariably regarded it as something most wisely left alone. And while it's true that a fastidious

disinclination to step outside the present may have sometimes compelled us to exclude all the most interesting (not to say the most important) matters from consideration, at least we could always claim that our hands were clean.

Yet perhaps the observationalists have been allowed to get away with too much. For a start, their terminology is tricky. We all know what scientific observation is. It's a vital part of the process of enquiry and explanation. But what on earth does 'observational' mean? Is it anything more than the expedient appropriation of a rather science-sounding term for alien purposes—the purposes of an aesthetic rationale? As for terms like 'open' and 'closed', one can only wish that their implications were rather more fully explored. There is a familiar political theme beneath this usage (some would say it's loud and clear) yet no one ever seems to pick it up. Partly no doubt because film-makers are more at home with Pop than Popper. But the contradictions and ambiguities which arise when ethnographic film-makers talk blithely about open and closed films are quite extraordinary, and deserve rather more attention than they get. Simply in passing, one might note that observational films about rigidly ordered tribal life involve making 'open' films about 'closed' societies which are then likely to be shown mainly to some of the most 'closed' circles of the 'open' societies.

It's all rather confusing. And when you think of those closed circles of appreciative fellow film-makers, lightly salted with anthropologists who have special motives for watching interminable hours of film, a question arises: Just who are these films for? Or more rudely: What's the audience?

Now the relation of the purer observational films to audiences has been a curious one. Those of us who made them have often managed an impressive disdain for publics of every sort. It was not that we lacked 'a theory of the audience', as the mass media people like to say. We had one all right—it was a prescriptive theory. The audience we aimed at was virtually under an obligation to share our own responses so sympathetically that misunderstanding would be impossible. And if

this sometimes meant that we made films exclusively for ourselves, so be it. Many artists have borne that cross. To make our films required unique patience, uncommon skill and a rare capacity for tireless observation. The very least required of an audience was equal patience and equally tireless eyes.

Anyway (the scientific bit) it was all in the cause of *evidence*. Observational films 'allowed people to see things for themselves', openly allowed the audience to draw its own conclusions with exemplary evidential candour. And moreover (the moral bit) they allowed the human subjects before our cameras to sustain a *being* of ontological purity unattainable in any other way. In a dubiously sanctified blend of moral and scientific experience the film-maker was now sharing his observations, 'allowing' anyone who stumbled into the screening room to participate in whatever such an experience might vouchsafe.

Some stayed to watch. Some slept. Some staggered out rubbing their eyes. For what was happening to ethnographic films in their muddling of observations and 'observationality', in their confusion of scientific and aesthetic criteria, was that they were getting longer and longer, and some of them were running for hours. No doubt this is partly explained in the same terms which account for the egoistic inflation and extension of fictional forms—1900 for example. But at the same time a variety of implacable scientific criteria were irresistibly pulling the genre further and further away from a concern for audiences—away from any consideration of *presentational form*. The established presentational forms had been narrative and dramatic. The new ones coming in were not. Internally, at the structural level of the shot, they were identical with research films. And formally, despite some atavistic straining in traditional directions, the research model seemed to be gaining the upper hand.

What no one seemed to notice, amidst all the talk of 'raw data', was that whether you thought it was raw or not this data did have a form—the traditional and distinctive form of the map. As aerial photographs mapped geographical topography, the new technology

with its long camera runs and ever deeper fields mapped the topography of social action, each frame, each picture, a co-ordinate of sorts, each intact shot having the unique descriptive accuracy of a continuously plotted representational field.

Those given the job of editing such maps visibly faltered at the task. Since childhood we have all been used to cutting up pictures, drawings and merely illustrative material of one sort or another. But how many of us have ever cut up maps? Whimsical though the notion may be, I suspect that the inhibition which comes over one at the thought of slicing into a map with a pair of scissors derives from an intuitive sense that a map is a representational field whose meaning inheres exclusively in its continuities. To disrupt these continuities is to destroy its meaning: an ellipsis in a co-ordinate series makes it impossible to get from A to B.

Film-makers knew something was happening but weren't sure what it was. The more one was trapped in these isomorphic offprints of the world, the more impossible it was to make them intellectually manageable—and according to a new and imperious ethic it had become impossible to discuss such material analytically while it was being shown since commentary, along with other difficulties, introduced an alien point of view. At times this led to absurdity: 'If the noise of a film is only the noise of the people and the place about which the film is made, then it is likely to be a better and more revealing film,' one author writes. Well, I wonder. Doesn't rather a lot depend on what you mean by 'revealing'? In many such films noise revealed nothing but noise.

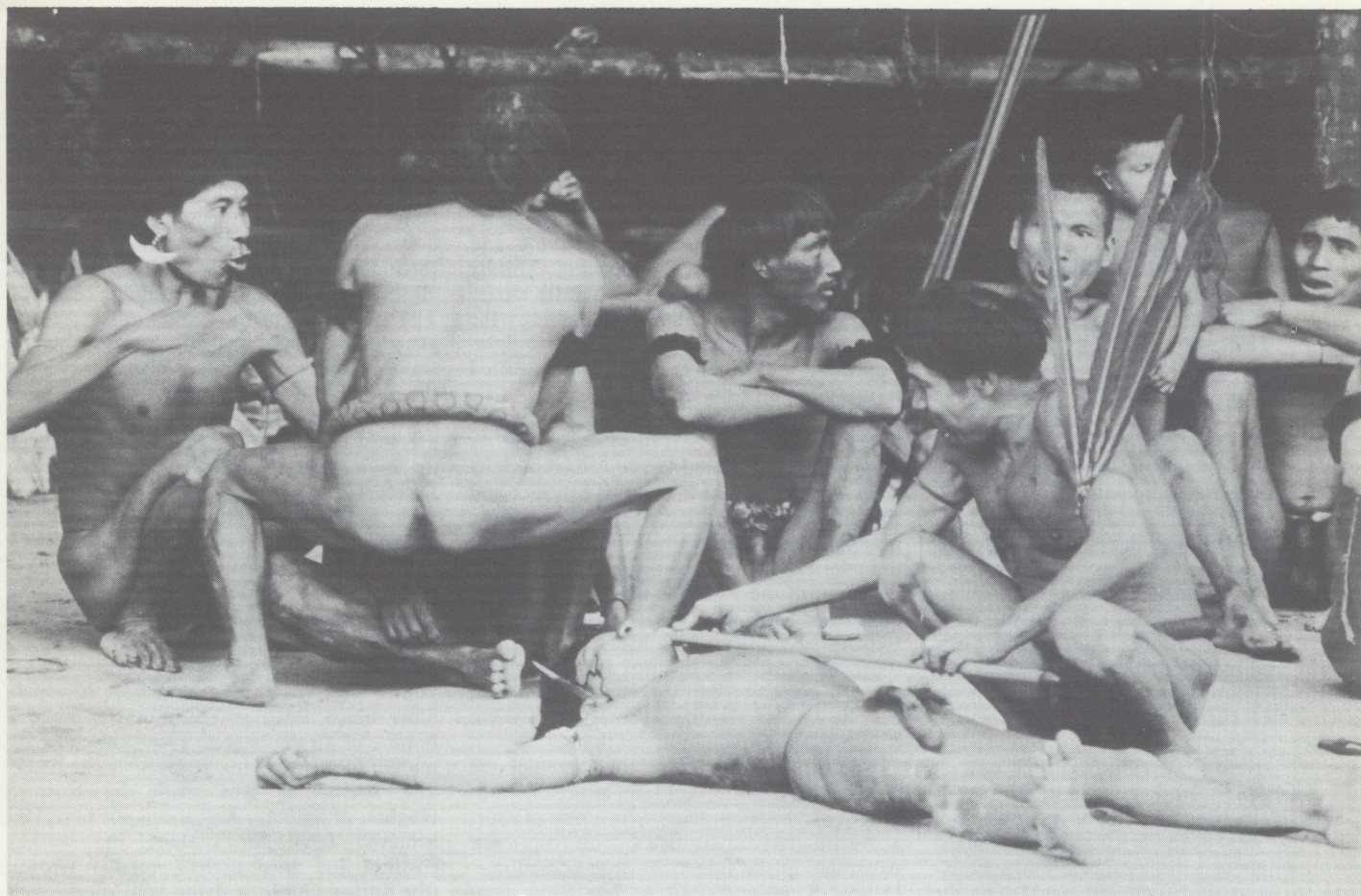
A sense of frustration about the limits of observationalism grew. 'Because films deal so overwhelmingly with the specific rather than the abstract,' complained David MacDougall some years ago, 'it is often considered incapable of serious intellectual articulation.' But did he mean *mere* film or *made* film (as Adam Kendon puts it)? Film as celluloid strip or as constructed sequence? In any case what this comment revealed was a longing for the freedom of language; and yet the free-floating syntactic liberty of words and sentences was exactly what the tied-down cartographic units of observational footage could never be.

Intellectual articulation demands, among other things, no holds barred in the manipulation of symbolic universes: it means that every form of semiotic paraphernalia be set freely dancing to the melodies of meaning and of time—a freedom and manipulability which the units of *mere* film used to compose the *made* films of observational documentary uncompromisingly, and frustratingly, disallow. Language implies a free and autonomous logical structure. Topographical evidence is enslaved by the shape of events. Can a purely observational cinema 'think for itself'? Not really. This is at once its glory and its shame.

Looking at the work on display at the Canberra Conference (and excepting the historically oriented films already mentioned), one could see a spectrum ranging from observationalism at its least compromising, all the way across to the sort of matter of fact utilitarian applications of the lessons in revelatory technique which observationalism has taught. At the pure end of the spectrum

'How the Myth was Made': Harry Watt back on Aran. 'He helped us,' George Stoney says, 'to identify a ton of processing and editing equipment which we found stored in a cottage loft.' With him are cameraman James Brown and sound recordist Paul Barnes. Photograph: George Stoney





'The Ax Fight': filmed by Tim Asch among the Yanomamo in Venezuela

are those films which remain among observational ethnography's happiest examples—the work of David and Judith MacDougall. In the ten years or so since the MacDougalls shot *To Live with Herds* (providing *Disappearing World* with a standard to aim at) the as yet uncompleted Kenyan series, *Turkana Conversations*, is perhaps the most substantial to appear. Of this the latest to be released is also one of the most attractive: *Lorang's Way*.

This is 'a portrait of a man who has come to see his culture as vulnerable,' in the MacDougalls' own words, 'and whose traditional role in Turkana society has been heightened by this realisation.' Maintaining the high standards of *To Live with Herds*, *Turkana Conversations* goes much deeper into the integumental complexities of tribal life. Despite some reservations one might have about the way the material is stitched together (a studied reticence where forthright exposition is required), I think it is fair to say that this is the sort of film which those of us who attempted work in the observational mode most hoped to achieve. If the aesthetic of naturalism requires that nature should be self-disclosed, then these conversations do just that, reflecting, on the part of the film-makers, an admirable blend of patience, knowledge of the subject and technical expertise.

Surely this is the way the Turkana would choose to present themselves? The power of the naturalistic illusion is such that one wants to answer 'yes'. In fact this question raises a set of problems well beyond the reach of naturalism, problems which *The People's Land* investigates. *Disappearing World's* report on the Eskimo of Pond Inlet, this film embodies the austerities of pure observa-

tionalism in a 'script' to which the people contributed a lot themselves. Consulted both first and last, the community used the opportunity of having a film made about them to state their views and speak out on pressing issues.

Like much of the material in *Turkana Conversations*, *The People's Land* was 'almost entirely made up of conversations or reflections that were unscripted or unprompted.' But there was a difference. When the camera film ran out the conversations stopped, only to resume again when the camera was ready 'at the very sentence where they had left off. This ... showed very clearly indeed that those who spoke knew very well what they wanted to say, and that they had agreed among themselves what direction their conversations would take.' (*Cambridge Anthropology*, Special Issue, *Ethnographic Film*, pp. 27–8). The conversational content of *The People's Land* is aimed at a specific audience—the administrators with the power to make or break the lives of the Eskimo.

Masked by resemblances of common technique, the difference between the sequences in *Turkana Conversations* and those in *The People's Land* is the difference between conversational self-disclosure and argument beguilingly given a conversational form. It is the difference between domestic speech and political utterance. Between internal and external address. Yet, as Hugh Brody explains, the almost fetishistic reverence for the feel and appearance of pure observationalism in *The People's Land* ensured that this very real difference was far from clear to the viewer. Indeed, it was carefully concealed. How interesting it might have been if the film's last sequence had been a post-screening but pre-release discussion by the Pond Inlet

Council telling how its members felt about the final work.

As Jean Rouch might justifiably point out, this sort of 'reflexive' device is hardly new. And in fact it was used in the case of one of the Australian documentaries shown, *Belonging: Rituals of Friendship in an Australian Country Town*. Honouring the peculiar male Australian tradition of 'mateship' in a rural setting (while undercutting the setting itself), its less premeditated effects were a good deal more revealing, especially in what they showed of the systematic exclusion of women from men's lives. And when women were included in the follow-up discussion film, *Talking About Belonging*, how very different things were. The atmosphere became measurably more human. No longer self-consciously playing their manly roles, no longer driven by narrative expectations they seemed at times only too determined to fulfil, no longer on one side of the cameras while the crew was on the other, they now confronted the film-makers under the eye of a common lens. One felt that that is where the film should have begun rather than ended. Curiously, the one memorable conversational exchange in the main opus was sparked by an outsider, a man who had wandered into a saddlery and took some time explaining why he needed some rather exotic leather gear for his horse.

I wouldn't be surprised if observationalists were soon sorry they ever mentioned the word 'evidence'. For whoever invokes it as the *raison d'être* of documentary film-making soon finds that it arouses expectations which are very hard to keep under control. On the one hand there are the scientists with their demand for background information; on the

other the radicals with their passion for salvation through demystification. Together, their demand for more and more evidence has become insatiable—evidence of context, evidence of what was omitted and why, evidence of the film-maker's role, biases and preconceptions, all the way down to whether or not it is true that the camera crew's choice of food subverted the eating patterns of local life.

The poor film-maker may even have the term 'reflexivity' thrown at him, along with an insistence that he let everything hang nakedly out—even if he hangs himself in the process. This was the gist of a paper submitted to the Conference by Jay Ruby, organiser of the annual Philadelphia Conference on Visual Anthropology—*Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology and Film*. As is often the case nowadays in the more philosophical ruminations of film folk, something called positivistic empiricism came in for an awful drubbing; but while his academicism might be easy to caricature, Ruby's main argument is unassailable. Films with scientific pretensions, he says, must accept the rules of science. Among which one of the more fundamental is that the researcher/film-maker make public both his assumptions and his methods.

Of course this is in fact often done today, usually in the form of a journal article or a set of notes—Hugh Brody's account of how *The People's Land* was made is an example. But that's not what Ruby is after. On the model of simultaneous translation, he wants simultaneous demystification—an answer to the question 'What's going on here?'—presented within each film. A clue to what he has in mind is to be found in *The Ax Fight*. Filmed by Tim Asch among the Yanomamo of southern Venezuela, it shows a set-with axes within a village and makes full use of 'run-up sound' before the camera shoots and 'run-out' sound after the tail of the film roll has clicked through the camera gate and flickered vanishingly up the screen. The run-up sound records the confusion of the film

crew waking up to the fact that a fight is beginning and scrambling to catch the action; the run-out sound records assorted comments and asides.

The film is in four parts and provides a clear view of the distinction between *observations* and *observationalism*. First there is the unedited observation. Then there's a slow-motion replay of the fight, during which an anthropologist identifies the combatants and tries to explain what is happening. Thirdly there's a kinship diagram with little circles and triangles and lines suggesting the structural underpinning of the fight. Fourthly, and finally, there is an edited recapitulation of the opening scene.

An Aboriginal man at the Conference was full of praise. What he'd liked about *The Ax Fight* was the coloured kinship chart with its circles and triangles. It was this abstract and simplified representation of social structure, graphically displayed, which had allowed him to understand and psychologically participate in the life of the Yanomamo. In that chart he recognised his own world. His comments were timely. They drew attention to something we have been inclined to forget; that when it comes to explanation, one diagram may be worth a thousand shots. Observation is one thing. Explanation another.

And for those who think that changing the world is more important than either observation or explanation, there were a pair of short and attractively unacademic items from Film Australia on the subject of drug addiction—Debbie Kingsland's *All In The Same Boat* and Graham Chase's *Thirst*. The second of these was a very taut piece indeed. *Thirst* is about boozing, now more than ever the male Australian's favourite pastime. Thanks to the 'performance' of the engaging Casanova whose carousing case history the film records, it comes across not just as sharply effective welfare propaganda (which it is) but as a stylishly told short story, the dialogue trailing off in terminal dots ... as the drinker, thick-tongued and maudlin, late at night, faces

something about himself too painful to voice. True enough to startle. Artful enough to grip.

But perhaps the most intriguing entry for those who expect even observational techniques to poke, pry and be rudely uncovering of social ills was James Blue's epic in Super-8: *Who Killed Fourth Ward?*. This was an investigation of what appeared to be a very deliberate urban non-renewal programme in downtown Houston. Blue told us that the three 58-minute television programmes were all shot on Super-8 using 3½ minute cassettes. The picture quality, even after several generations, was excellent. And the budget was even more impressive. On the other hand the parodistic format could hardly have been more disorienting to Aussie audiences, who are used to getting their 'tele-doccas' served up in a pretty regular, rectangular form. Director Blue's on-camera role was that of a Jack Webb/Dragnet type of investigator, all ominousness and daring, 'going in' to a Black neighbourhood where few White Men have trod. To me, funny. To others, passing strange. For the Houston audience, perhaps a gambit that worked.

What else? How about *The Boomerang*? If you've ever sat through the sort of 'craft' films which leave you wanting to make a bonfire of all the baskets ever made, this 20-minute film is for you. It redeems the genre. *The Boomerang* was made by Howard Hughes, of Sydney. And if the northern HH achieved fame for making the world's costliest and most useless wooden aerofoil (the Spruce Goose, a flying-boat slipped and hangared at Long Beach these many years), his southern namesake deserves fame for honouring one which may be the world's cheapest and most useful, and must certainly be the most faithful. Endearingly narrated by the boomerang-maker himself, the film enables prospective British purchasers of commercial samples to distinguish 'guaranteed comeback boomerangs' from the sort which might end up in France. Recommended.

A bar-room scene in Graham Chase's *Thirst*: 'True enough to startle; artful enough to grip'



Exhaustion probably explains why the Conference and its conferees came, on the eighth day, to a somewhat inconclusive end. My own conclusions were that if the lessons which observationalism had to teach had not been learned by then, they jolly well should have been. In any case, the shooting and cutting rules for evidence have been clear enough for years. Now's the time for a return to a hearty eclecticism: let a hundred techniques bloom.

Not, of course, in the domain of research films. There, the exigent cartographic demand for uninterrupted representational fields has to be honoured, and that's that. But if your aim is explanation, and you presume to inflict your explanation on audiences, then every device in the repertory of graphic and photographic imagery should be used. One model of the sort of technical eclecticism I have in mind, enormously successful in tackling a difficult and complicated situation and rendering it intelligible against all odds, and which uses every technique in the book—being veraciously *verité* when necessary, and colourfully diagrammatic when diagrams can more economically make the point—is Adrian Cowell's *The Opium Warlords*. Certainly it is one which ethnographic film-makers addressing audiences might usefully bear in mind.

In The Picture

Moscow-Rome Package

Many of the Russian silent films made before or during the Revolution, which we knew about only from hearsay (and chiefly from Jay Leyda's *Kino*) have turned up in Italy this year as the result of a package deal between the Italian Cineteca Nazionale and the Soviet film archives, who were evidently eager to offer the films in exchange for prints of Italian pictures, mostly it seems from the Fascist period. The Cineteca Nazionale and the Centro Sperimentale entrusted Orio Caldiron with making a first selection from this treasure chest, and his choice was put on show in April at Rapallo during a seminar on the theme 'The Cinema from the Tsars to Lenin'. The films later had their first public screening at the new theatre, the Bellarmino, which the Cineteca Nazionale has at last been able to open in Rome. Previously, only Turin and Milan had regular archive programmes open to the public.

Having for years cultivated the idea that Russian cinema was synonymous with Soviet cinema, Moscow has finally let us see that even before Lenin declared the film to be the most important of the arts, there were film-makers in Russia who were aware of what was happening in Paris, Rome or Hollywood and who were already making an individual contribution. An opportunity to see the Tsarist films does not tempt one to minimise the more creative impulse that was to come with the Leninist cinema from Kuleshov onwards. It just fills in the gaps in our information about those years, especially in the work of directors like Protazanov and actors like Mozhukhin.

The selection began appropriately with what is considered the first Russian film, *Stenka Razin*, made by Drankov in 1908 at the studios he had opened the year before in St. Petersburg. *Stenka Razin* was the name of a legendary Cossack hero. The director was one Vladimir Romashkov, who was never heard of again, but Drankov himself photographed the film and was obviously responsible for its 'artistic' conception. This fragmentary ten-minute picture consists of six *tableaux vivants* which tell the story of a sad Persian princess, Stenka's mistress, seen waiting in the soldiers' camp for the hero's return. Her wailing seems to get on the soldiers' nerves and they

end by throwing the poor girl into the Volga. The most impressive scene shows the men crossing the river, singing a song which according to Leyda used to prompt Russian audiences of the time to join in the chorus.

The first Russian film to compete with the historical spectacles that were then pouring out of Italy was *Defence of Sevastopol* (1911), which was produced by Drankov's rival Alexander Khanzhonkov. The print we saw is only half the length of the original, which apparently included scenes at military headquarters in London and Constantinople, as well as scenes with Mozhukhin playing Napoleon III. Khanzhonkov shared directorial credit with Vasili Goncharov, with whom he was to make several costume pictures. Tsar Nicholas II took a personal interest in the production and consented to the use of imperial troops for some of the spectacular battle scenes.

The final sequence of the evacuation of the city is frankly stagey. One gets a feeling that the extras entering the frame from left and exiting right are running round behind the camera to make a new entrance. When the crowd has finally passed—and from a new angle we can see the boats pulling out to sea in long shot—we are shown first a soldier and then a stricken mother and child doing their scenes of woe against a painted backdrop of the ruined city, complete with smoke pouring in 'from the wings'. But this phoney reconstruction is compensated for by the last shots of the film, which have a rare documentary value. The film introduces us to veterans of the Crimean War, first French and English old soldiers smiling coyly in group shots and then a full turn-out of Russian veterans, with each in turn coming in front of the camera and doffing his cap in greeting.

Another example of historical reconstruction is found in the 1915 film *Tsar Ivan the Terrible*, based on the story *The Girl from Pskov* which inspired Rimsky-Korsakov's opera. The part of Ivan is played by the great opera bass Feodor Chaliapin, who was not very happy about his first film appearance. The director, Ivanov-Gay, had some difficulty crowding everybody into the frame for the scene showing the people of Pskov debating whether they will receive the Tsar as friend or foe; the cameraman also had trouble getting the tall Chaliapin into the frame.

Even so he manages some highly adventurous set-ups, including one which shows Ivan arriving in Pskov, entering the frame top between two lines of crowd, passing out of view under an arch which is unlit and re-emerging in close-up. The camera has panned slightly to accommodate the movement but all remains in focus.

Chaliapin's acting was inevitably operatic. A more revealing insight into how the Russian cinema was attempting to adapt acting styles to the new medium is to be found in the performances of Ivan Mozhukhin. Like Drankov, he was to flee Russia in 1917 and never return, ending his days in France where he changed his name to Mosjoukine and enjoyed a brief period of fame during the 1920s. What Mozhukhin might have become if he had stayed in Russia (or returned, as Protazanov was to do) can be imagined. The three films we saw from his heyday run the gamut from the outrageous camp of *The Little House at Kolomna* (1913) to the deeply serious portrayal of Tolstoy's *Father Sergius* (1918), the last important film made before the Bolsheviks took over the film industry.

In between, we find Mozhukhin giving a rather hammy, John Barrymore style of performance in Protazanov's stylish *Queen of Spades* (1916), a film more striking for its décor and photography than for any particular cinematic invention. It was surprising, however, to find that Protazanov did not indulge in Expressionist effects for Hermann's hallucinations. The ghost of the old Countess is as solid as an armour-clad ghost in an amateur *Hamlet*. The only trick shot is when the Countess' laughing face is substituted for the Queen of Spades which the confident Hermann believes is the winning card. The impressive camerawork was by Yevgeni Slavinsky, who was later to direct films himself.

The Little House at Kolomna offered Mozhukhin as a dashing guards officer who in order to stay close to the girl he is courting dresses up as a woman and is engaged by the

girl's mother as cook. Mozhukhin tries to keep it quite hearty throughout, relishing smoking a pipe or making a mess of his kitchen chores. He is unmasked when Mother comes home unexpectedly from church and is startled to find that her cook is shaving.

Mozhukhin was to be sneered at by Mayakovsky and ignored by Soviet film historians, but in *Father Sergius* at least he wins a place among the immortals. Tolstoy's wonderful story, of the handsome young aristocrat in the St. Petersburg of the 1840s who gives up a brilliant military career to become a monk, is loaded with philosophical insights that obviously belong more to the novel than to the film camera, especially in 1918. But in the early sequences, Protazanov recreates the time of Tsar Nicholas I with an eye for detail that was to be the hallmark of Russian costume pictures, before and after the Revolution. Mozhukhin shows considerable restraint in depicting the young Sergius' adulation of his Tsar, with none of the eye-rolling palpitations of so much cinema of this period. Later, when he has entered the monastery and is still struggling with worldly doubts, he once again effectively underplays the scene in which Father Sergius is visited by a society lady who has made a bet that she will be able to spend the night in the monastery. She wins her bet, but the experience so shocks her that she is heading for a convent when we last see her. That this scene succeeds in being as moving as in Tolstoy's original is to the credit of director and actor.

The Moscow-Rome package deal includes other curiosities, and such already familiar films as Kuleshov's hilarious *Adventures of Mr. West in the Land of the Bolsheviks*. Unfortunately only two reels were available of *Engineer Prite's Project*, Kuleshov's first film, made when he was eighteen, but even from the first and last reels one could see that a film-maker of talent was emerging. More conventional was the first

Mozhukhin in 'Father Sergius'



version of Gorki's *Mother*, directed by Alexander Razumni in 1919 and an example of a sentimental propaganda film trying to keep up the competition with Hollywood even under the new regime.

The greatest curiosity, however, was *The Cameraman's Revenge*, an animated film made in 1912 by Wladyslaw Starewicz, a Pole whom Khamzhonkov had been enterprising enough to 'discover' and bring to Russia. The film employs animated puppets, which I believe were not much in use at that time, and Starewicz uses beetle characters for his story of provincial infidelity. A bored husband falls for a music hall singer and takes her to a hotel ('Hotel de l'Amour'), where a cameraman who is in love with the singer follows them and films their night of love through the keyhole. Mr. Beetle's wife, equally bored with married life, has meanwhile been receiving her lover, and there is a fight when Mr. Beetle comes home and surprises them. Husband and wife make up and he takes her to the movies, where the film they see is none other than the one which our cameraman had been filming of Mr. Beetle's amorous adventure (and he is of course the projectionist). The wife swipes the husband, the husband swipes the cameraman and the cinema catches fire. Mr. and Mrs. Beetle are last seen in jail together, resigned and reconciled. The characters are all brilliantly conceived and animated beetles. Perhaps the most delightful invention, however, is the use of the cinema, the camera, as *deus ex machina*.

JOHN FRANCIS LANE

Christ Stopped at Eboli

At present Francesco Rosi is in Rome editing two versions of *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (*Christ Stopped at Eboli*), based on Carlo Levi's autobiographical novel, first published in 1945. Gian Maria Volontè stars as Levi, a Torinese artist exiled to a small town in Lucania (now Basilicata) under Mussolini. Irene Papas is an influential small-town widow, and François Simon plays a drunken parish priest, long fallen from grace, who turns his Christmas midnight mass sermon into an incomprehensible harangue against fascism and the war in Africa, while the mayor and his followers parade around the church singing a fascist anthem.

Levi, who died in 1975, first discussed the project with Rosi some twenty years ago, but the director shelved the offer in favour of projects like *Salvatore Giuliano*, which he found more pertinent to contemporary political realities. Now Rosi, who himself comes from Southern Italy, has found a backer in RAI, the Italian television network, which has enabled him to keep the film as authentic as possible, without having to succumb to the American market. Like the Taviani brothers' *Padre Padrone* and Olmi's *L'Albero degli Zoccoli* (both also financed by RAI), *Christ Stopped at Eboli* is part of an isolated but growing pastoral vein in Italian cinema, confronting the problems of the *contadini* (peasants)

'dispossessed of their culture by the arrival of a new one via the mass media and TV which has superimposed itself on their own ancient culture. The peasants, surrounded by motorways and TV, see the evidence in the pollution and despoliation of their own culture, without being able to reap any of the benefits.' In the film, Rosi aligns his perspective with Pasolini's call for a return to the roots of peasant agriculture.

'The Italian left,' Rosi says, 'has continually chosen options which favour the worker at the expense of the peasant. We need to make it clear to young people that they shouldn't reject working on the land, that it has as much dignity as any other kind of work.' The film updates Levi's novel (malaria is no longer a problem amongst the peasants so Rosi doesn't deal with it), but in doing so reveals that many of the hardships are the same today as they were forty years ago—unemployment, ostracism, forced emigration (formerly to the disillusionments of expatriate America, now to the industrial strife of Milan), and a stultifying patriarchy which still requires widows to wear black, year in and year out in the scorching heat, and wives to live as 'white widows' while their husbands work in the city. These realities are embedded within a narrative structure which remains faithful to Levi's book: 'A journey into the interior, with a lyrical, fable-like intimacy, but also a choral, epic, fresco-like form.'

The remoteness of the Lucanian peasants' way of life lies in their geographical, political and religious isolation from world and national events, which filter down from Rome, a place more foreign to them than Albania. The continual struggle with the arid, grey land assumes Old Testament proportions: 'There is no place for religion in the world of the *contadini* precisely because everything participates in its own divinity, everything is divine, not in a symbolic sense but in an actual sense. The sky and the

animals, Christ and the goat, have their correspondence. Everything has a natural magic.' Levi's awe at the witchcraft of Lucania, the magical aura of the life and the land, becomes in Rosi's hands a lament for the loss of precisely these aspects of a world that for Levi was 'outside history'. The peasants' sympathy for the brigands of the 19th century, who plundered and killed the Southern landowners, has been supplanted by a reaction of, at the most horror, at the least indifference, towards the urban violence of the Brigade Rosse.

Levi's almost pantheistic viewpoint gives ample scope for the film's visual landscape of oaks, rocks and clay. Part of the film was shot in Matera, among the *sassi*, dank, whitewashed caves hewn out of the cliff face and inhabited until shortly after the war, when families were evacuated much against their will into modern apartments with electricity and running water, away from the riverless valley dotted with scrub, olive trees and herds of sheep and goats. The sparseness was also dictated by a strict economy of means—for the four-hour television version of the film, Rosi had little more film at his disposal than he would for a normal two-hour feature. Actors mix with actual peasants; in the sequences shot in Potenza even the mayor played a small role, while over a hundred unemployed locals found temporary work.

In his relations with the peasants of Lucania, Rosi found an echo of Levi's experiences as a doctor, benefactor and outside observer. 'Travelling through the places where Levi, a Northern intellectual, discovered a new world, confirms a Gramsci-like optimism, a belief in a better future for men and women who are endowed with an exceptional humanity. But one aspect I want to bring out in the film is that even the best of bourgeois intellectuals and artists, like Levi, who are quite happy to live amongst these people, with whom they feel a real

brotherhood, end up leaving them to it. I had the same experience when I was Visconti's assistant on *La Terra Trema*, I'm all too familiar with it. I get on well with these people, but I know that at a certain point I'll be leaving them to carry on buying expensive clothes and shoes, travelling around, while they have to stay there and face their problems. Which means that Levi in the film is a bit like me. The film is an encounter between a bourgeois intellectual representing a refined Northern culture and a completely different, distant world, the world of the peasant in one of the most neglected regions of the south. It's not only a journey into humanity, but also into nature, objects, lights, shadows, sounds, animals, inside people's houses—a journey into the minds and eyes and consciousness of the people.'

TONY MITCHELL

Australian Expansion

Australia this year had 16 feature films at the Cannes Festival, including the much publicised *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, which is evidence of the continuing development of the Australian industry. Yet however much the critics may praise some of these films, Australian film-makers still have a long way to go before the industry is on a firm financial footing.

The problem centres on the increasing budgets for Australian films. Even the successful films of the past few years have had small budgets by comparison with some of the plans now being thrown around. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* cost \$456,000 to film to negative stage, *The Devil's Playground* \$300,000, and even *Eliza Fraser*, which brought in Susannah York and Trevor Howard, was completed for \$750,000. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* has now grossed \$6 million and *Eliza Fraser* in excess of \$2 million, still not a great amount in terms of the percentage that is returned to the film-maker.

François Simon and Gian Maria Volontè in 'Christ Stopped at Eboli'



If one now looks to the projects announced for production this year, it is obvious that even relatively small-scale films have large budgets by Australian standards. *The Battle of Broken Hill*, for example, has an announced cost of \$739,000. This film will tell the story of two Turks who on New Year's Day 1915 declared war on Australia. Another project, *Dawn*, tells the life story of the great Australian swimmer Dawn Fraser. It is likely to have a great run within the country, but the subject matter, and the absence of any name stars, makes the \$762,000 budget look like quite a gamble.

Since 1971 there have been 68 feature films made in Australia without any making a major international mark, and certainly no breakthrough into the United States market. It is not that efforts have not been made, what with Richard Chamberlain starring in *The Last Wave* and Geraldine Fitzgerald in *The Mango Tree*. The grand total, before Cannes this year, of overseas sales in the past three years is about \$1.3 million, compared to the \$15 million spent on film production in that time. But despite this lack of exporting success, the last few years have been heady ones for the film producers and directors, and there is certainly optimism about the future; radio and newspaper interviews are crowded with Australian actors talking about making a career in motion pictures.

The big question now is to what extent the Federal and the various state governments will continue to support the film industry if it does not make the international breakthrough. It is one thing for a state government to support a film like *Storm Boy*, which cost \$300,000 to negative stage and has grossed over \$2 million, and another to support films that are creeping up into the one and one and a half million dollar category. Politicians, after all, see the film industry as a venture that should eventually show a profit, but the size of budgets is making that impossible in many cases. As one Australian film writer recently pointed out, no English-speaking country of Australia's size has ever made its cinema industry viable financially. No country of that size has ever continued to turn out \$1 million films and keep them profitable by grossing the necessary four or five million dollars at the international box-office.

One Australian film-maker, James Ricketson, has suggested that there should be a return to very low budget films, costing between \$50,000 and \$200,000, which could absorb the talents now available in the country and make a decent profit on the internal market. This would not preclude the production of large budget films, but it would at least reduce the dependence on an international market which, to be realistic, is unlikely to provide much solace to Australian producers. In the meantime, plans are being laid for a new rash of action movies. Peter Weir, the director of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Last Wave*, is planning a \$1½ million re-creation of the landing at Gallipoli. The 'king' of



Bardem at work in Madrid on a scene for 'Seven Days in January 1977'

Australian television, Graham Kennedy, is to star in a \$600,000 production, *The Odd Angry Shot*, about an Australian commando unit in Vietnam, while the South Australian Film Corporation is launching the half-million dollar *The Money Movers*, which depicts an armoured car robbery.

ROBIN BROMBY

Bardem's Seven Days

If one had thought the deaths of Franco and, at the same time, forty years of repressive censorship would have unleashed a stream of overtly political films in Spain, one would be wrong. Wrong that is according to Juan Antonio Bardem, one of his country's most consistently political film-makers. A committed Communist since 1943, Bardem fought the regime in a series of films starting with *Death of a Cyclist* in 1954. And though later works like *Calle Mayor* and *La Venganza* would earn him a Venice Festival prize and an Academy Award nomination respectively, they did nothing to endear him to the powers that were.

During Franco, Bardem was arrested some seven times, 'but only imprisoned once,' he will quickly point out. The chunky half Catalan (on his father's side) shrugs off any 'hero' image his countrymen would foist on him. 'To make films anywhere is a sort of miracle, here it was a real adventure too. I've stayed in Spain because if I know anything, it's about my own roots, my own country. I believe that of all the art forms, cinema depends most on roots. Generally speaking, you can't name me any director who has really done his best work outside his own country. Even Buñuel makes Spanish pictures. He just happens to shoot them elsewhere.'

At 55, Bardem continues to be a political hot potato even in Spain's currently more democratic climate.

In his first film for two years—*El Puente*, made in 1976, won the top prize at Moscow last year—he is reconstructing the notorious Atocha Street massacre in Madrid in which five workers' lawyers were slaughtered and four severely wounded by a right wing commando. The killings had come in the wake of kidnappings, and after, murders too, by the extreme left-wing group GRAPO. For *Seven Days in January 1977*—the title of the movie now being completed in Madrid—Spain's new-found democracy was put to the test. The Atocha Street assassins were eventually rounded up and this coincided with the police severing their connections with right wing activist groups. With their arrest came also the legalising of opposition parties. Altogether a watershed in contemporary Spanish history.

The film, costing 30 million pesetas—around £210,000—and expensive by Spanish standards, is being made as a Franco-Spanish co-production, and Bardem, together with his producers, is clearly hoping for international exposure. 'In a sense,' says Bardem, 'it's a film about extremism of any kind. These are incidents that could happen anywhere. I try to explain in the film how there was a kind of operation against democracy to stop its progress and go back again to a dictatorship. It is a mixture of information and invention. A sort of fictionalised documentary approach.' Much of the documentary will be provided for by footage from a 16mm film shot by the Communist collective during the actual week in question. The project has an added controversy in that the trial of the Atocha Street killers is expected to start soon. And the producers are hoping for an October cinema release—'to mark,' they say, 'the third anniversary of the death of Franco.'

Bardem believes that 'political' as opposed to 'opportunistic' films are scarce because Spanish film-makers

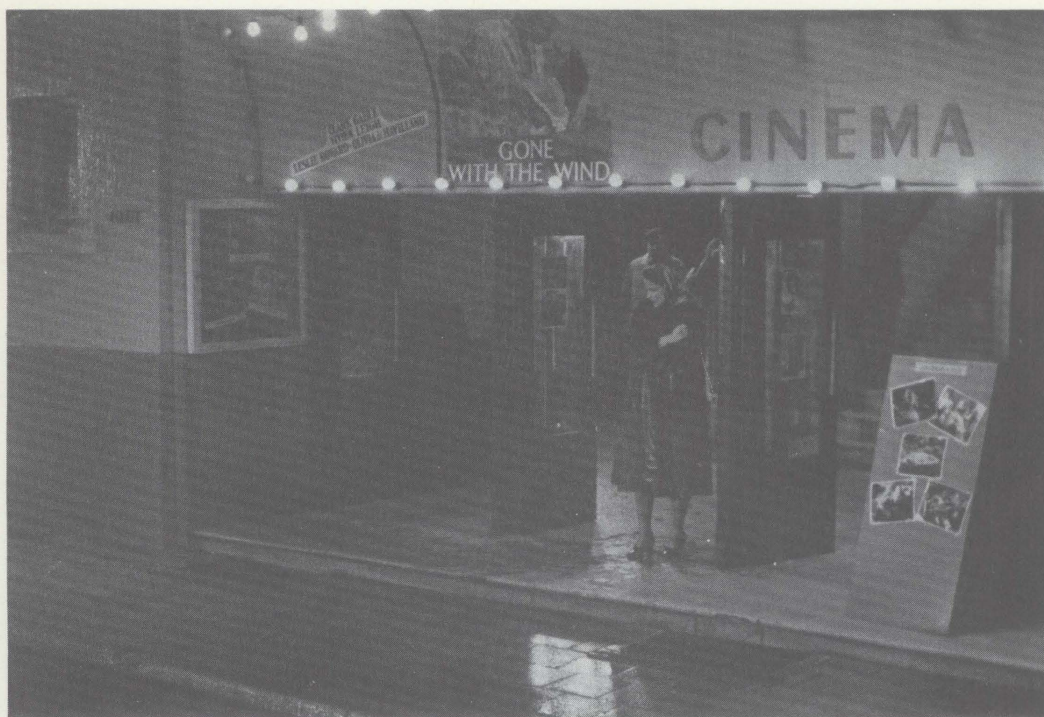
are still a little confused about things. 'There is certainly an epidemic of young people wanting to make films, but it is so difficult. Under Franco, there was a clear cut barrier—censorship—which spurred us all on. Now there is one barrier again—the economic one.'

QUENTIN FALK

Independent Voice

The Independent Filmmakers Association (IFA) is not to be confused with the Association of Independent Producers (AIP). Founded in 1974 to 'provide a forum and a voice for the independent cinema,' the IFA now claims 270 members, 'consisting not only of filmmakers but also of critics, educationalists, distribution and exhibition workers.' Its recent submission to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Trade puts the case for more consideration—and more cash—for these independent interests.

The submission stakes a claim for a genuine growth area which has so far been largely left out of account in the Terry and Wilson reports on the film industry. The Terry Report suggested that aid had to look beyond considerations of commercial profitability towards 'the benefits to be derived by the community as a whole'; the Wilson Report envisages that the British Film Authority, when it finally emerges, will support 'films of artistic and cultural merit'. But, as Vincent Porter pointed out in the Summer SIGHT AND SOUND, there is still a long way to go in more closely defining these terms. Meanwhile, small parcels of public money are going, through the BFI Production Board, the Arts Council Artists' Film Panel and the film and video panels of the Regional Arts Associations, to assorted activities whose urgent if hesitant growth contrasts with what the submission



'A Woman Between Dog and Wolf': Marie-Christine Barrault

describes as the 'wait and see defeatism of the established industry'.

'It is remarkable,' the IFA paper points out, 'how much this cinema has developed in the regions ... its definitive emergence is characterised by the development of film workshops using video and Super-8 film as well as 16 mm, with resource pools of equipment.' Groups 'are now working in Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham and Sheffield.' It logically follows that the first of the actual proposals in the IFA submission is that funds should be provided to extend these workshops as 'the production base for independent cinema'. The budgets of existing sources of finance should be increased; but it's also suggested, on an altogether more ambitious plane, that there should be a new fund 'directed towards supporting films of cultural and social merit which would otherwise have no source of finance.' The proposal is that such a fund should meet the full production costs of pictures budgeted up to approximately £250,000 (the lower level of commercial production), and that the fund's 'practical minimum level' would be about £2m. 'The BFA,' the submission goes on, 'should set up a further fund for the development of distribution and exhibition ... to include films which have not been publicly funded, and foreign films. ... The provision of funds for cinema modernisation should be conditional on the installation of professional 16 mm projection facilities as part of this policy.'

The submission is perhaps deliberately vague about what it envisages as the total cost, but firm in its insistence that 'independent cinema cannot now be allowed to continue struggling on the basis of passionate commitment alone.' Hastily, it suggests that no speedy nation-wide renaissance is to be looked for; even with the kind of funds envisaged, which would repre-

sent a very large percentage increase on anything at present available, development would probably remain gradual. 'The irony,' the submission concludes, 'is that while the proposals may appear radical in a British context, in a European context they are humble indeed, and hardly compare with the systems operating in various European countries.'

The IFA may take a rather rosy view of the way state subsidies work overseas, and an over-simplified one of the division between 'mainstream popular entertainment cinema' and 'the independent cultural sector'. Realities are more complex than didactic polemic allows. But the case for more aid for this sector, whether on the basis of a separate fund or sizeable increases in existing resources, or both, is one the Government surely has to take into account. 'We are aware,' says the IFA, 'that the notion of a subsidised cinema is not widely supported at present within the industry, but it should be pointed out that the industry itself has a remarkably poor record in terms of imaginative innovation.' Quite so. And in the area of independence, as the IFA membership defines it, subsidy is the key.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

A Woman Between Dog and Wolf

André Delvaux is at present cutting his fifth feature film, *A Woman Between Dog and Wolf*, the first he has made in Flemish since *The Man Who Had His Hair Cut Short* twelve years ago. He wrote the script in collaboration with a writer of his own age, Ivo Michiels, and together they developed a story about three young people during the German occupation of Belgium, the Liberation and its aftermath. After more than thirty years, the subject is still controversial, partly because of the

way the long-standing conflict between Flemish and French-speaking communities was further complicated during the war years, and this is the first film produced in Belgium to deal with that period of oppression, misguided idealism and desperate confusion. It stars the French actress Marie-Christine Barrault as Lieve, the young woman torn between the two men to whom the 'dog and wolf' of the title ambiguously refers. Adriaan (played by Rutger Hauer) is her husband, a fanatical Flemish country boy who joins forces with the Germans fighting the Bolsheviks. François (Roger Van Hool) is a resistance officer who looks for shelter in the cellar of Lieve's huge house.

The film, Delvaux says, is a chronicle of the 40s up to 1952, seen from the woman's point of view. 'It's a chronicle in the sense that there is a concatenation of small, sometimes dramatic events and an evolution within the characters out of which the significance of the film emerges.' It's the first time in a Delvaux film that a woman has been the central character, and also that a commitment to a political reality has come so close to the surface. More important, it seems to be the first of his films in which the mixture of dream and reality is not interwoven in the structure. Delvaux says that *A Woman Between Dog and Wolf* has nothing in common with the 'magic realism' of his previous efforts, but that the basic elements are still the same. 'The symbols cease to be literal: they become language elements in the syntax of the film, and are therefore systematically used as recurring signs. The main character is a woman without a conscious ideology, finding herself confronted with the conflicting ideologies of the two men. She can't accept the way they both reduce her to an object and make her obedient and silent. At a certain moment she explodes, because she can't bear it any longer. But this explosion is quietly built up

by a lot of signs which shape her consciousness.'

Delvaux admits his admiration for the moral subtlety of a film like Malle's *Lacombe Lucien*, or more generally for the way Polish cinema dealt with the period of the Nazi occupation without making concessions. 'The truth and existence of the historical events have an all-embracing importance,' he says. 'It inevitably becomes a film about those years, though not a political statement. Adriaan is the idealist, the romantic, the collaborator who dies for his beliefs and who is therefore a truly tragic character, squeezed between the tongs of historical reality. François on the other hand is not a romantic hero at all, because he is on the side of the winners and that's always a bad situation compared to the losers. I also show what went wrong at the time of the Liberation, the things that were done to the collaborators. And from then on you'll see the contradictions appear in the character of François: as soon as he realises that he's on the winning side, he becomes a careerist.'

Most of the scenes of *A Woman Between Dog and Wolf* were shot in calm, oppressive bourgeois interiors which seem to be a natural extension of the secret psychology of Delvaux' characters. One of these scenes shows the visit of a mysterious man to Lieve's house, now transformed into an antique shop. The stranger looks like a personification of the little grey bourgeois escaped from a painting by Magritte. He suddenly intrudes on Lieve, admits his deep love for her, wants her to leave the country with him, and finally bursts into tears while playing Beethoven on the piano. It's a scene with a strong emotional impact, and even if in the film's overall conception Delvaux has moved a long way from his usual obsession with the passage from the real to the imaginary, such a detail reveals how the utter normality expressed through painfully accurate images takes on a slightly unreal, illogical resonance. Delvaux cautiously admits that this is not a surrealist scene in itself, but not a logical one either. 'I was thinking that there should be something to disconcert this woman completely. And also, as a spectator, you have no way of coming to grips with this character. He disorients you, although in reality he's not that different from the other two men: he offers to be Lieve's servant, but the moment she accepts he will become her master.'

Asked about the visual qualities he was looking for, Delvaux says that lighting and colour will be very bright for the beginning of the film; then, as war breaks out, everything becomes more muffled, but there is always the luminosity of Lieve's garden. At the liberation there is a big explosion, and suddenly everything happens outside the house, in the streets of Antwerp. Once Adriaan returns we are again locked up in the house, and we evolve from a normal colour scheme to rooms filled with red darkness; the colours of nightmare and madness.

'One of the interesting challenges,' Delvaux says, 'was the way of presenting night scenes in wartime,

when all forms of lighting were forbidden. Normally a night scene is constituted of a tiny light source in the surrounding darkness; an oil lamp, a lighted window carved out of a façade. This was out of the question here, so to solve our problems I looked at the work of Belgian symbolist artists who often painted night scenes, sometimes even with snowscapes. Out of these pictorial solutions we developed a style for the scenes of the garden and the streets at night.'

Delvaux' last film before *A Woman Between Dog and Wolf* was the commissioned art film *Met Dieric Bouts*, about the medieval painter. Although Delvaux' work has always aroused memories of Dutch and Flemish painters, I was interested to know how far this cinematic exploration of the world of a painter might have influenced him as a director looking at the world of forms he must shape into a film.

'I have the impression that I always approach a sequence in the same way, because film-making is a job and there's a sort of professional habit of how to build a scene. In the *Bouts* film I looked for a unity between details in the paintings and textures I found in nature, patterns in the streets. I looked at everything in the same way, but to achieve that unity you have to make an art film. With a dramatic feature you have to orient yourself on the characters and actors, so you can't treat the objects and the materials as separate entities. Nevertheless, even in my new film I treated the garden, the landscapes of Brabant and the streets of Antwerp in an identical way. You'll feel it: the characters are "located" in the settings in the same way a painter puts his figures in a landscape.

'I felt that strongly while shooting the scenes of the Liberation in the streets of Antwerp, where we had a huge crowd, jeeps, a lot of movement. So I had to rely on a second unit cameraman for support coverage. But I couldn't give this cameraman the framings of what to shoot, as I had to stand by my first cameraman. And when I saw the rushes I discovered that most of the material was unusable. It was shot like news film, it didn't have any basic form regarding composition, use of focal lengths, choice of colours. Because this is already part of the "writing" of your film, which varies from one director to another, as much as our syntax and vocabulary in daily speech are different.'

PATRICK DUYNLAEGHER

Wenders at Warners

How appropriate to be meeting Wim Wenders, heir apparent to Robert Aldrich's crown as 'Mr Film Noir', in the Warner Brothers drugstore-luncheonette. The dining area walls are lined with production stills from the Warners catalogue, and Wenders, passing up Bette Davis as Queen Elizabeth, Paul Muni as Emile Zola and Fredric March as Mark Twain, chooses the booth under Little Caesar himself, Edward G. Robinson. How appropriate also for Wenders to have been picked by

executive producer Francis Ford Coppola to direct *Hammett*, based on mystery writer Joe Gores' 1975 novel, with Gores himself and Wenders collaborating on the screenplay.

The time is 1928, the place San Francisco, and as the story opens ex-Pinkerton operative and aspiring novelist Samuel Dashiell Hammett is revising *The Dain Curse* for the pulp magazine *Black Mask* and correcting the proofs of *Red Harvest*. Hammett is forced to put aside his writing when a friend and ex-colleague is brutally murdered while investigating corruption inside the scandal-ridden San Francisco Police Department. Putting on his gumshoes, he enters the treacherous night-time labyrinth of the City by the Bay, and after much murder and mayhem ends up unmasking the highly placed mastermind behind all the evil doings. What better project for Wenders—from Highsmith to Hammett.

'I was in Australia preparing my next film after *The American Friend*,' Wenders says, 'when I received a telegram from Francis asking if I'd be interested in directing *Hammett*. Ironically enough, because the main character of my film was going to be a detective, I was re-reading *Red Harvest* at the time. I flew to Los Angeles and met Francis and his associate Fred Roos, who will be producing the film. I felt they were producers I could trust. This was vital to me since *Hammett* is, of course, my first American, "studio" film.' Meanwhile Coppola, with the departure of United Artists' five top executives in January, had moved the project from that studio to Orion Pictures, the new company formed at Warners by the former United Artists men. And Nicolas Roeg, who had been set to direct, had moved on.

Wenders has been spending a great deal of time in San Francisco, scouting locations and conferring with Coppola, whose company, American Zoetrope, has its headquarters in a warehouse on the bay.

'*A Woman Between Dog and Wolf*': Marie-Christine Barrault, Senne Rouffauer



He has also been screening American films of the 40s and 50s at the Pacific Film Archives in nearby Berkeley. 'Two films which I had never seen before particularly impressed me: Tourneur's *Out of the Past* and Goulding's *Nightmare Alley*. In fact, I'm meeting Lee Garmes, who shot *Nightmare Alley*, to talk about some of the things he did in that film. I'd like to shoot *Hammett* in black and white, but I doubt if the studio would permit it.'

I asked Wenders who would be the ideal actor to play Hammett, who is thirty-four at the time of the story and who is described by Gores as being 'a lean six feet two, [with] a hard, angular countenance, clear penetrating eyes, expressive black brows and fine, prematurely grey hair' and with 'a stubborn whipcord strength'. Wenders says his first choice was Robert DeNiro, but he couldn't do it. 'Actually, the ideal actor to play Hammett at thirty-four would have been Montgomery Clift. The resemblance is remarkable. Anyway, we're still looking. Too bad James Dean isn't alive. I looked at *Giant* again the other day, and at the end of the film, when he has grey hair, I realised that he too could have been our Hammett.'

PETER STAMELMAN

Festival in Hong Kong

As film festivals proliferate with the speed (and some might say, the menace) of an Andromeda Strain, so it becomes more difficult for each fresh event to propitiate both cynical producers and itinerant critics. Hong Kong, where the film society movement has been particularly active through the years, held its second international festival this summer, and escalated smoothly from a parochial gathering into a showcase for world cinema that attracted entries from some twenty countries. Amiability and efficiency characterised the festival organi-

sation, as they do indeed the whole of this nominally British but predominantly Chinese enclave.

The main programme was inevitably a little dated by European standards, with *Providence*, *Le Diable Probablement*, *Padre Padrone* among the more notable treats, but there were also films that had not yet opened in London, such as Jean-Jacques Annaud's *Black and White in Colour* and Shinoda's *Orin* (with its ravishing photography by Miyagawa). The two most rewarding areas of the event, however, were the retrospective of Cantonese cinema of the 50s, and the tribute to James Wong Howe.

Howe was born in Canton in 1899 and accompanied his parents to America at the age of five. But his feelings for China increased in later years, and the splendid booklet prepared by the festival recalls his Hollywood skills and triumphs and also contains a superb selection of photographs from his earliest youth. As well as a large-scale exhibition (which his widow, the novelist and poetess Sanora Babb, would like to be a permanent fixture at Hong Kong's City Hall), there were screenings of such jewels in the Howe crown as *Transatlantic* and *Hud*.

For those ready to dismiss Chinese cinema as a series of poorly assembled kick-flicks, the Cantonese retrospective came as a surprise. During the 50s, many directors used the southern dialect film as a medium for social comment, especially veterans like Li Tie (who told me that he'd worked in the business for 45 years) and Wu Hui, whose *Family* is one of a *Forsyte*-type trilogy. The acting in these monochrome films tends to be over-zealous, and the music is repeatedly laid like a thick sauce over dialogue and action alike, but the exteriors have an agreeably persuasive look to them, and the earnestness and obliqueness of the social criticism are clear even to the unsubtitled eye. Incredible to learn, too, that some 1,800 features were made in Canton during that decade, with only 300 or so now extant.

Hong Kong held other pleasures for the visiting cinephile. A visit, for example, to the Shaw Brothers studios overlooking Clear Water Bay, where eight new films were in progress (Shaws make forty each year). Stars here can earn up to half a million U.S. dollars annually, while directors may aspire to \$50,000 per picture. And auteurist hopes were raised by the sight of a poster announcing a Sam Fuller movie, *The Meanest Men in the West*, with Lee Marvin and Charles Bronson; only to be dashed some hours later, in the air-conditioned stalls of a Kowloon cinema, when one found it to be an absolutely terrible TV movie, attributed to Fuller and one Charles S. Dubin, shot on a shoestring and stitched together (to judge by the copyright dates) over some nine years. Finally, an opportunity to see the best of Hong Kong television, where directors like Ann Hui and Fong Yuk-ping deal with contemporary problems in the colony with a seriousness and a realistic concern far removed from the martial arts melodramas.

PETER COWIE

MICHAEL POWELL

Myths and Supermen



'A Matter of Life and Death'

John Russell Taylor

There can have been few sillier or more improbable cinematic squabbles than the one which began in April 1942 in the columns of the *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, was pursued in 1944 in E. W. and M. M. Robson's booklet *The Shame and Disgrace of Colonel Blimp*, and again in 1947 in the Robsons' book *The World is My Cinema*. The Robsons at this time were running something called the Sidneyan Society (named, rather obscurely, after Sir Philip Sidney), the ultimate aim of which was to 'stimulate public opinion so that the British film industry may take the lead (not lag behind America, as hitherto), and prosper as the standard-bearers to the world of all that is finest in British thought, action, leadership, enterprise and moral supremacy.' Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger (note the *German* name) were, it would seem, not living up to these ideals. In *49th Parallel* ('this monumental example of filmic folly') Nazis on the run were allowed to talk about the decadence of the British and not instantly struck down. *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* ('the most disgraceful production that has ever emanated from a British film studio') so blurred the public consciousness that the Government started to release unimpeachably anti-Nazi German refugees from internment camps and a wave of strikes swept the country. And in *A Matter of Life and Death* 'the black-hearted bitterness against Britain, which was implicit in [the Powell-Pressburger school's] wartime output, *The Spy in Black*, *One of Our Aircraft is Missing*, *49th Parallel*, *A Canterbury Tale* and *Blimp*, is now explicit, openly and sneeringly anti-British . . . now that the war is over.'

What it amounts to is that the extreme right-wing, jingoistic Robsons were accusing the high Tory Powell and the committedly anti-Nazi Pressburger of being insufficiently out of sympathy with that famous reactionary zealot Adolf Hitler and his pack of unspeakable Huns. All very weird, and happily now long forgotten. We should after all, as we are always told, consider the source. By now several generations, if they were aware of the Robsons at all, have done just that. And yet

in a strange way they were on to something: it was strange that they, of all people, should have been on to it, and it is obvious that they did not realise at all what it was. For their writings, though they appear to be about politics and implicit political attitudes in film, are really vitiated by a truly astonishing naiveté and are not finally about politics at all, remaining at the simplest level of jingoistic patriotism, very much on a par with Ethel Smyth ordering Violet Woodhouse

in World War I, 'Don't play Bach, Violet; it's playing the German game', while crazed spinsters stoned dachshunds in the streets. They were worried only about certain things in the Powell-Pressburger films which seemed to them not totally anti-German; as far as the deeper ideology of the films was concerned, they really knew nothing and cared less.

But they were affected, powerfully, by a strong irritant quality in the films — something which still makes the considerable body of Michael Powell's work disturbing and controversial today. And that, I think, resides mainly in the ideological basis of the films. Curiously enough, since Powell has tended to be regarded as above all a wayward aesthete, whose films have no message beyond the medium. (Not, of course, that that is not also an ideological basis, and in terms of conventional British attitudes to film a very irritating and disturbing one.) But Powell's films do have another kind of consistency, which is perfectly susceptible to analysis in political terms. I specify Powell's films rather than the Powell-Pressburger corpus because, although the attitudes and *donnés* I am referring to are very evident in the Archers films, and it might be natural to suppose that Pressburger, as the accredited writer of the team, had a great deal to do with them, they are also in fact clearly definable in Powell's work both before and after his teaming with Pressburger. And there is quite a bit of evidence that it was Powell's influence even at the scripting stage that pushed the films in just this direction.

Perhaps the easiest, because most provocative, way of encapsulating this is to say that the most immediate comparison which

springs to mind in the cinema is with the films of Leni Riefenstahl. If that seems to be going a bit far, a more respectable literary analogue presents itself: there are many obvious parallels with D. H. Lawrence. And how indicative that Martin Scorsese, fascinated as he is by the figure of the unpleasant hero, should quote Powell as one of his great devotions in the cinema, even though he can surely not have seen many of the films which would most clearly bear out this instinctive sense of affinity. But let us start with a specific illustration: one of Powell's less known films, and rightly so, for truth to tell it is not very good. But failures, after all, often leave their creators more open to analysis than do triumphantly self-defining successes.

A Canterbury Tale is, even seen today, defiantly odd. In 1944 it must have seemed quite insane. Briefly, it concerns three characters, all in the Services, who converge accidentally on Canterbury in the middle of the war—present-day Canterbury Pilgrims, as the film rather obtrusively insists—and whose problems are all sorted out, as it were by supernatural intervention, in the final scenes in war-torn Canterbury itself. There is the American soldier who believes that his girl has forgotten him because he has not heard from her since leaving home, the landgirl whose archaeologist fiancé is missing, believed dead, and the organist who worked before the war in a cinema and cultivates cynicism about his early musical ambitions. They arrive late at night in the village of Chillingham, just outside Canterbury, and the girl promptly has glue dumped in her hair in the blackout. It is the work of the 'glueman', who apparently has been doing this to all the local girls who go out, or might go out, with soldiers from the nearby camp.

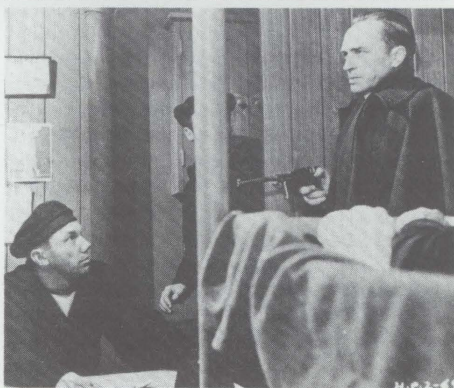
The body of the film is a whodunit, with diversions. Rather rapidly it becomes evident that the glueman is actually the local mayor, J.P. and petty dictator of the area, played by Eric Portman in his most spiky manner. But then something very weird starts to happen. The character, who sounds like some kind of sex maniac (kinky misogynist, lives with mother), is gradually presented in a more and more sympathetic light. He is the one who is concerned for the fabric of England and its preservation; he sets out to open the eyes of the philistine servicemen to the significance of the Pilgrim's Way and the mystical meaning of Canterbury, and before long even the least imaginative begin to have dreams and visions. He is, perhaps, Puck of Pook's Hill (one of Powell's favourite books, by the way), a mischievous and unpredictable force of nature, one of the dark gods surviving and superficially domesticated, working at once to disorient and in the long run effectively to reorient people, destroying in order to create. At least, that seems to be the conclusion the other principal characters come to: maybe he was a little high-handed, but he meant well, and after all glue does wash out, eventually.

All the subsidiary themes point in the same direction. Correspondences are constantly being found. The American serviceman can communicate with the local wheelwright because they both know about wood and how it should be treated; even if the accents are different, the language is the same. The newcomers to Canterbury are specifically identified, in a very curious prologue, with Chaucer's pilgrims, as a hawk dissolves into a

fighter plane and horses are replaced by tanks—but all under the same sky, in the same unchanging landscape of England, where the same road bends over the same hill immemorably ('The blood that warms an English yeoman/The thoughts that hurt him they were there'). The film is all about continuity and pattern, the importance of tradition and discipline, the mystical forces that reside in nature, for that special few who can feel and channel them—and, of course, the vital role of the superior being who points other, lesser mortals in the right direction, who inspires them, and who may use unconventional or downright immoral methods to do it. The Portman character is clearly beyond good and evil, a sort of Home Counties superman who dares to dream, one of those people he talks about 'who walk step by step so that one day they can climb Mount Everest.'

Here you have, on the script level (and a too talky, too explicit script it is, to be sure), most of the leading themes of Powell's cinema neatly packaged. In this film they are not, for the most part, very successfully absorbed into the style and substance of the work: they lie about in awkward nuggets on the surface. There are moments, even so: Sheila Sim hearing the pilgrim bells on the site of the old straight track; Dennis Price aureoled in sunlight at precisely the moment he is saying, 'To believe that, I'd have to see myself with a halo first'; the very peculiar 'bad taste' scene mocking the village idiot, who is yet presented as something more than a joke, a mysterious, magical figure in the mists. But these remain moments, hinting at the existence of a different order of reality from the normally apparent, 'documentary' kind. More typically, and more effectively, the same sort of effect is created in Powell's films

Supermen: Eric Portman in 'A Canterbury Tale'; Conrad Veidt in 'A Spy in Black'



by the overall atmosphere he evokes; it is easy enough to feel, but very difficult to pin down chapter and verse for someone who is not on the same wavelength. How, for instance, can one establish that *The Red Shoes* (1948) is a fairy-tale, permeated by the atmosphere and attitudes of a fairy-tale, rather than just a novelette which goes over from time to time into a sort of brutality seemingly quite at odds with the rest? (Powell himself says, 'I only said what was in the fairy story: they cut her feet off and she goes to heaven on her stumps. This was a proper fairy-tale.')

But clearly Powell is totally conscious of what he is doing. In a 1971 interview with Kevin Gough-Yates he goes into some detail: 'I distrust documentary. Always have. I have no interest in what people tell me is the truth. How do I know it's the truth? I'd rather make up my own truth... Any painter will tell you that, or any poet. The trouble is I have a poetic approach too. I have to find a theme or something which appeals to my imagination and work on it from there. Sometimes people get the better of me, like Emeric, who was always trying to get rid of this mystical sort of dual theme that went on. For instance, in *I Know Where I'm Going*, when Pamela [Brown] played this part I saw what a marvellous creature this was and what an interesting part if we could somehow link it with the old legend without her knowing it. And so I shot her entire sequence—and nearly drove everybody mad—so that I would link her half consciously and half unconsciously with what was going on—not exactly spying on things but being drawn.'

This sense that something lies beyond the scene is everywhere apparent in Powell's work once one is alerted to it. Sometimes it is unmistakably central to the subject. The 1940 *Thief of Baghdad* (which seems to be much more Powell's film than anyone else's) is the only one which is overtly a fairy story, and arguably the film which, in the whole history of the cinema, functions most perfectly on that level. *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) is clearly at least a fantasy, taking place mostly in a dream world created (or is it?) in the mind of the airman hovering between life and death. The opera films, *Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) and *Bluebeard's Castle* (1964), are obviously a special case, though it is surely significant that both operas chosen are out and out fantasies, with no hint of *verismo*.

But much more telling from our point of view are the films which superficially appear to take place in a world we can more or less recognise, and establish a constant reference with reality, yet have pervasively these other terms of reference too. If *The Red Shoes* is inherently a fairy story, so, certainly, is *I Know Where I'm Going* (1945), with its headstrong heroine played by Wendy Hiller, its fairy prince in disguise (Roger Livesey), its oracular double meanings, romantic curses and magical kisses. Curses and riddles and spells and fate are an essential part of the dramatic structure in an amazing number of Powell's films. Right back to *The Phantom Light* in 1935 the tales of ghosts and the creation of an other-worldly atmosphere play an important role, even though there everything is eventually explained away as a wreckers' stratagem. Much more important, *The Edge of the World* (1937), which seems

from evidence which has been available up to the National Film Theatre's Powell season in autumn 1978 to be the first truly personal Powell film, is entirely based on the working of signs and omens, particularly the evil fate which always attends a sighting of the hills of Scotland from Hirta (the very name of the island means 'death'), as happens just when the crucial quarrel between the two young men takes place. And the whole story, which superficially looks as though it should be a sub-Flaherty essay in romantic docu-drama, is given a very different colouring by being told in dreamlike flashback and scattered through with visions (the old, blind grandmother somehow knows when the young man plummets to his death on a distant cliff, just as the blind mother in *Peeping Tom* is the only character who sees true) and portents and the supernatural interpenetration of nature and the weather with human life and emotion.

In terms of realisation, *The Edge of the World* contains many devices which are to recur in Powell's later films. In particular, there is the habit of cutting away from human characters at important moments to concentrate on natural phenomena of various kinds—a tree, a stone, the passing of a cloud across the sky—which make some kind of mute comment on the human action, clarify or intensify or maybe undermine and redirect the emotional content of a scene. Nature in Powell's films is never '*l'impassible théâtre*' in which mankind's little dramas are played out, but an active participant. This is particularly evident in such post-war films as *Black Narcissus* (1947) and *Gone to Earth* (1950). The intrigues of both might be, more or less, susceptible to normal psychological explanation: a group of nuns posted to a remote part of India go in various ways funny because of sexual frustration and social isolation; an educationally underprivileged girl, prey to primitive superstition, comes to feel, neurotically, that her fate is linked to that of her pet fox. But in practice the realistic psychological explanations are minimised; there are, the *mise en scène* constantly implies, more things in heaven and earth . . .

But how, precisely, does it imply this? In *Black Narcissus* the first important element is the decision to make the whole thing in a studio, with no Indian locations at all, thereby ensuring stylistic unity but at the same time throwing the emphasis on a subjective, romantic evocation of India rather than anything which could be mistaken for documentary veracity (a bold, if not wilfully perverse, decision to make in the heyday of neo-realism). From this starting point everything is conventionalised and choreographed. The routine assurances of the Indian characters that the nuns are meddling with stronger, stranger forces than they can recognise are combined with the similar, though differently motivated, warnings of the British resident and built into a sort of recurrent chorus. And from the very opening glimpses we are given of the convent awaiting the nuns' arrival, with the old Indian woman scurrying round as though involved in some intricate ritual dance, the magical tone of the story is established.

In the body of the film sequence after sequence has the air of being patterned, built according to some hidden plan. In fact, several of the key scenes, such as that long, virtually wordless sequence in which the nun

played by Kathleen Byron runs amok, attacks the mother superior and sets off, extravagantly made up, for the nearest European man, were composed first by Brian Easdale and then storyboarded like an animated cartoon to the music and the 'orchestrated' sound effects on the track. The overall effect of this treatment is to suggest the objective reality of the primitive forces which are shaping the characters' destinies, instead of permitting us to dismiss them as mere superstitions in the heads of the natives.

*Gone to Earth** carries the 'Disneyish' side of *Black Narcissus* still further. Since the plot it derives from Mary Webb's rather silly novel is minimal, most of the points in the film are made by quite non-literary means. Characterisation and mood are taken care of largely by a very bold and simple use of colour in the costumes. Red, the colour of blood and the huntsman's coat, is used in its traditional role as the colour of passion, the flash and the devil. It is the colour of the dress in the portrait of 'milady' which the animal squire Jack Reddin first offers Hazel and which she refuses. Later, when she has married her pale cleric and decides to run off with Reddin, she finally puts it on, and wears it, somewhat unrealistically, at all hours of the day and night. Her other side, that of the elfin child of nature, is suggested by her dressing in pale, cool colours like the eau-de-nil of her first shop-bought dress.

Pictorial composition is used in the same bold, deliberately simple fashion to indicate the relationships among the characters: in particular, there is the omnipresence of Reddin, the horseman forever posed, it seems, on the nearest convenient horizon when Hazel does anything tending to assert her independence of him—the scene where she takes her unfortunate oath, 'by God's Little Mountain', to marry the first man who asks her; the scene of her baptism by total immersion under the sceptical gaze of Reddin, riding by. And the punctuation of the human drama with almost abstract scenes of changing weather, wind bending the saplings double, clouds passing across the sun and the like—many of the details seem to be inserted into the Shropshire landscape through the designing art of Hein Heckroth—recalls in almost equal measures *The Blue Light* and *Bambi*. Not for nothing, clearly, has Powell hailed Disney as the greatest film-maker of all.

A pantheistic view of nature and wholesale indulgence in the pathetic fallacy represent one element of Powell's creative personality: one could hardly go so far as to call them a message, though they play an important part in the overall significance of his films. What does look much more like a message, in the normal sense of the term, is the whole nexus of ideas involving patriotism, the military, and traditions of discipline and ritual in British life. All of this comes up very evidently in his major wartime films—*49th Parallel*, *Colonel Blimp*, *A Canterbury Tale*—and most of the lesser works like *One of Our Aircraft is Missing* and *The Volunteer*. But it is obviously more than just a timely response

* There are two versions of *Gone to Earth*. The British version, discussed here, is entirely Powell and Pressburger's; the American version, retitled *The Wild Heart*, which has been shown on British television, was reworked by Mamoulian for Selznick.

to the specific conditions of the moment: it occurs also in at least one pre-war film, *The Spy in Black* (1939), is central to *The Small Back Room* (1948), and recurs with equal force in the mid-50s films *The Battle of the River Plate* and *Ill Met by Moonlight* and even in that prime ideological anachronism *The Queen's Guards* (1960).

At first glance these may seem to be curiously inconsistent with the fey and pantheistic Powell. And yet a connection between the military mentality and esoteric mysticism should not surprise us, seeing that they are a combination so often found in the lives of famous British soldiers, sailors and, particularly, airmen. More curious is the question of how the two divergent images of the hero in Powell's work, the restrained, stiff-upper-lipped man of action and the temperamental artist-as-superman, can be reconciled. The answer, probably, is that they cannot. Each type hardly ever appears in a pure state. We are generally allowed to see an emotional and/or extravagantly eccentric side to the apparently ironclad military heroes—*Colonel Blimp* dedicates nearly three hours to doing this for Clive Candy; *The Small Back Room* originally burst into full expressionism with a dream sequence dramatising Sammy Rice's urge for the bottle; *Ill Met by Moonlight* is a high-spirited and ruthless examination of the mad Englishman as hero—while the heroic status of the artist-superman, beyond good and evil, remains ambiguous in all the films in which he features.

And this ambiguity persists in spite of—perhaps even intensified by—the ample evidence of Powell's own identification with his artist-supermen. He has, for instance, compared the film-maker's role so often to that of the Diaghilev type of impresario, channelling and co-ordinating the headstrong talents of many other artists to one unified end, that it is barely conceivable there could be no sort of identification in his own mind between himself and the impresario Lermontov in *The Red Shoes*. It seems, too, that some of the more abrasive and highly-coloured of his favourite actors, Eric Portman and Anton Walbrook in particular, regularly stand in for the director as *meneur du jeu* and therefore represent Powell the artist, if not necessarily Powell the man, within his work. And of course in *Peeping Tom* (1959) he himself plays the father whose experiments on his son set off and condition the whole action of the film.

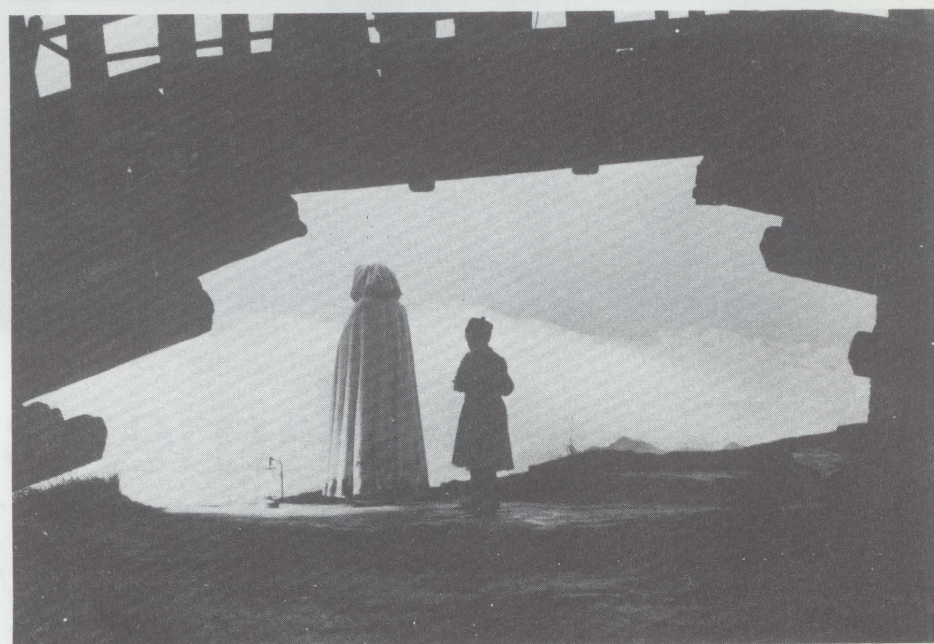
How far are any of these characters actually considered as heroic? There is certainly something demonic in all of them: Powell seems to share with Bergman and Fellini the vision of art as itself demonic, a magical mystery involving ruthlessness and martyrdom on the part of the artist. Colpeper in *A Canterbury Tale*, as noted, appears finally to be manipulating the lives of the other characters for the better, from highly idealistic motives, even though his way of going about it is picturesquely sadistic and perverse, and although he seems to have sacrificed his own private happiness to the job of *deus ex machina*. Lermontov has the same character conformation: he requires impossible sacrifices from others because he is willing to make them, and more, himself. Those who work with him see him explicitly as a devil and totally inhuman ('Ah, he has no heart, that man . . .'), and yet we are allowed

some privileged indications that this effect is not achieved without pain and deliberate self-sacrifice: his reactions to the turn of events when there is no one to see but the voyeuristic eye of the camera prove that. Of course the Bat character Walbrook plays in *Oh, Rosalinda!!* (1955) runs the same kind of game in a lighter register, while the various tempters and tormentors played by Robert Helpmann in *Tales of Hoffmann* weight it in the other direction in that they are given, and need be given, no realistically human dimension. If we do not see enough of the father in *Peeping Tom* really to speculate about his character and motivation, we do see enough of his creation, the son, to appreciate under the bland exterior of Carl Boehm the same tragic pursuit of perfection, the sense of being driven by a demon as well as a daemon.

There is at least one character in Powell's films who seems to fuse the two types of hero, the epic and the tragic: Dr. Reeves in *A Matter of Life and Death*, played by Roger Livesey halfway between the young tearaway-cum-old fogey of *Colonel Blimp* and the sailor/laird of *I Know Where I'm Going*. Both these characters belong to the epic strain: military discipline with hidden depths. And a lot of that carries over in *A Matter of Life and Death*. But Reeves has another aspect there, as master of the camera obscura, a device which, in film terms, enables him to play God and the possession of which, Powell says, 'makes Livesey seem more like God'. At once it harks forward to *Peeping Tom*, a film about scotophilia, 'the morbid urge to gaze', and back to the comment of Clive Candy in *Colonel Blimp* when the nurse he fancies appears and disappears: 'It's like the Indian rope trick: first you want to see it, and then you see it.' If the creator is in some way essentially devilish, in a more general sense his activities are benign, and it is perhaps significant that the last artist-figure in Powell's cinema to date, Morahan in the 1969 *Age of Consent*, is played by James Mason, at this stage in his career a primarily gentlemanly actor (though no doubt Powell remembers *The Man in Grey* and *Fanny by Gaslight*), and that he comes over as celibate and benign to the point of incomprehensibility, at least as far as the girl is concerned.

In other words, much of Powell's work is concerned with the rapprochement, if not the total reconciliation, of opposite ideals: the artist's self-indulgence is inseparable from the artist's self-sacrifice, which becomes a sort of ritual purification; immaculate disciplining of the surface, such as is required of the military hero, does not preclude his also being hooked in to the big connection, secretly but surely aware of the dark forces. All Powell's characters are—to use a title he might have used if Thorold Dickinson had not got there first—men of two worlds, and the balancing of these two is the central act in Powell's creation. Ultimately his films are about cinema, they all take on the aspect of metaphors, more or less removed from the explicit, of the creative process. In it, as Powell shows it to us, creation and destruction are one and the same, each necessary to the other: all creation, finally, is the sport of my mad father, the man with the movie camera. ■

Myths and fairy-tales. Reddin and Hazel in 'Gone to Earth'; 'Black Narcissus'; 'I Know Where I'm Going'





Rohmer's PERCEVAL



Gilbert Adair

Eric Rohmer has always cut a somewhat solitary figure. At a time when most of his New Wave contemporaries were freely subverting minor American thrillers, he was serenely plotting the course of his *Contes Moraux*, six cool, epigrammatic variations on a theme whose place in cinema might be compared to that, in literature, of 18th century epistolary novels. At a time when sexual explicitness on the screen had already become dully commonplace, the most shocking moment in a Rohmer film was, perhaps, when we were finally permitted to feast our eyes on Claire's charming knee, full-frontal, being fondled by Jean-Claude Brialy. Now, when French cinema is passing through a *crise d'inspiration*, Rohmer, as sure of purpose as ever, has embarked on another series, this time of ambitious literary adaptations. The first was, of course, *Die Marquise von O...*, filmed in German. The latest, *Perceval*, based on the 12th century epic of Chrétien de Troyes, was still being mixed when I recorded this interview with Rohmer in his office at Films du Losange, the production company he founded with Barbet Schroeder.

Before dealing with *Perceval* itself, I'd like to ask you about your habit of making films in series.

ERIC ROHMER: Is *Perceval* part of a series? Perhaps. It is, in any case, less deliberately so than the *Contes Moraux*. But it's only in the cinema, after all, that series are unusual. Literature offers any number of examples: poems centred round a common theme and published as a collection, short stories published together in a single volume. And a film, by its length, is closer to the short story than to the novel. There are always enormous problems to be faced when one tries to adapt a novel to the screen. *Die Marquise von O...*, on the other hand, was easy. Kleist's novella barely fills forty pages and yet it contained quite enough matter for a 90-minute film. The idea that some magical correspondence exists between the cinema's hour and a half and the 250 pages or so of a novel is a received one

Above: *Perceval* (Fabrice Lucchini) rides a shaggy pony through Rohmer's artificial forest

and totally false. But the film-maker, no less than the author of short stories, may require more space to express himself than that afforded by a single film. So you see the usefulness of the series.

I gave another reason, though, in my preface to the *Contes Moraux* when they were published recently—and published, precisely, in short story form. I claimed that for the film-maker personal inspiration was next to impossible, that the *film d'auteur* was perhaps a myth. Writing a scenario and shooting a film are not only different stages of the film-making process, they are two quite separate acts of creation. In general, when one speaks of an original screenplay, it was written first and, if it's good, might just as well have been printed. It is not the same in the theatre: no matter how badly a play is performed, its own qualities remain on the printed page and, if the play is well known, the spectator takes that into account. But in the cinema, if one has written a text and brought it to a certain degree of perfection, it may well lose by being filmed. The cinema will not necessarily be a plus, it will be something else, an adaptation—even where one's own work is concerned.

So the film-maker will be torn between two roles: that of author, in the literary sense, and that of director. I am not at all sure that this coheres into what is called an *auteur*. Not unless a kind of unity is established, however arbitrarily. After all, a director in the theatre can turn his hand to Shakespeare, then Chekhov, then Beckett, say. Many do just that, and in theory nothing stops the film director from doing likewise. It might be very interesting, though... No, I feel he must be more than that, more of a composer than the conductor of an orchestra. And for me the series, which is a constraint but, as is the way with artistic constraints, capable of stimulating the imagination, provides the necessary unity.

Do you consciously separate these roles when preparing and shooting a film?

With the *Contes Moraux* I considered that I was, above all, a writer and questions of *mise en scène* seemed less important; with *Die Marquise* and *Perceval* I am more truly a *metteur en scène*. Then again, what I have just said strikes me as completely false...

Why six *Contes Moraux*?

I had one idea, one small but very precise idea. I developed it. I fed it into an imaginary computer, adding a few accessory elements, and the computer came up with six tales. But I was pleased to limit myself to six because what I complain of in many otherwise intelligent directors is that they don't know how or when to stop. The crisis currently besetting our profession stems partly from that. Nowadays—in France, at least—making a film seems to consist primarily in telling some personal story. Everyone has at least one personal story to tell, which is fine, except that becoming an artist almost always depends on the ability to advance beyond the 'autobiographical' stage. This was, of course, a concept of cinema advocated by my New Wave friends and myself in the 1960s; but what was then an important and healthy reaction has ended by boring the public. Of *cinéastes* working today I can only think of Bergman who continues to film the same story, more or less, without losing his

capacity to surprise us. With the others there is a constant danger of diminishing returns and the lack of a really solid scenario.

But for most film-makers a screenplay is not intended to be comparable to a literary text. Could you envisage shooting a film with the original material in a more embryonic state?

I repeat, I believe more and more strongly in the importance of the scenario. And, speaking for myself, I couldn't begin to shoot with a text devoid of intrinsic literary qualities. It's something I feel as a spectator, too. I'm very quickly bored by films whose dialogue, construction, characterisation do not excite me in themselves. I can't conceive of a film which would be the pure *mise en scène* of nothing. It was an idea that was kicked around in the 60s, but I don't believe in it. I believe in the subject. The notion of an abstract or even non-narrative cinema seems to me *passé*. Take Antonioni, for example, not that his scripts were ever weak. But I particularly like *The Passenger* because it has a real story, a plot, even if the plot is not that original.

Why *Perceval*?

Well, I read the text and liked it. It had the added advantage of being relatively little known. In France it is hardly read at all any longer; or else it's read in a flat prose translation. My idea was to make a double translation, as it were: to translate it into verse that would be much closer to the original, then into film, where I felt that Chrétien's masterpiece could make a much stronger impression today. You understand, I made *Perceval* as much out of love for the text itself as for the cinema, which I treated, as was the case with *Die Marquise von O...*, more as a means than an end. A means of serving literature. Why not, after all?

Film-making is of course my vocation, but film-making can be anything one pleases. If Kleist's novella is now better known and more widely read than it was, if I have managed to clean *Perceval* of the patina with which it was encrusted so that it may reach a public to whom the literary text is a closed book, I'll feel that—in one respect, at least—my films are successes. But making *Perceval* was also a means of getting off certain well-trodden paths, of avoiding the trap of naturalism, which I feel has completely exhausted its possibilities. In the relation between literary and filmic narratives, in the way my actors learned to speak, in the play between the stylised and the real, I hope I may have enriched cinema a little... well, let's just say I don't believe I'm in the rear guard.

The visuals of *Die Marquise von O...* were inspired by the Empire style in painting and furniture; you even staged one or two rather Greuzian *tableaux vivants*. Will *Perceval* have the look of art works of the period?

I had no desire to reconstruct the Middle Ages such as they were, or as we imagine they were. *Perceval* is less historical, in that sense, even than *Die Marquise*. My aim was to give as authentic an expression as possible to Chrétien's intentions—not to interpret the text from a modern viewpoint, as Frank Cassenti did in his film *Chanson de Roland*, but to visualise the events Chrétien narrated as medieval paintings or miniatures might have done. Of course, I don't give a hang if

the *result* is authentic. It would be wishful thinking to suppose that one could portray a period in history and its ideology as they presented themselves to the people who were living at the time. Only the starting point has a claim to authenticity. I used 12th century literature and painting and music—there is a lot of music in my film—to arrive at something else, a totally personal creation which, I hope, will also offer a less than conventional view of the Middle Ages.

Because working in the past has enabled me to discover certain *new* possibilities of expression which would otherwise have escaped my attention. For instance, the coats of mail worn by the actors are absolutely faithful to those of the period, i.e. made mail by mail. Well, we discovered a kind of truth in those coats of mail. They were extremely heavy, the actors and stuntmen were forced to invent ways of moving in them, which finally inspired a whole new approach to the kind of gesture to be used in riding horses, battle scenes, and so on. Something not seen before in historical films.

Gesture would seem to be very important for you. But in *Die Marquise von O...*, where the actors ape the gestural rhetoric of 18th century anecdotal paintings, the spectator who in a museum would accept the conventions, or at most smile at them, is tempted to laugh outright when they are animated on an enormous screen and in a quite different cultural context.

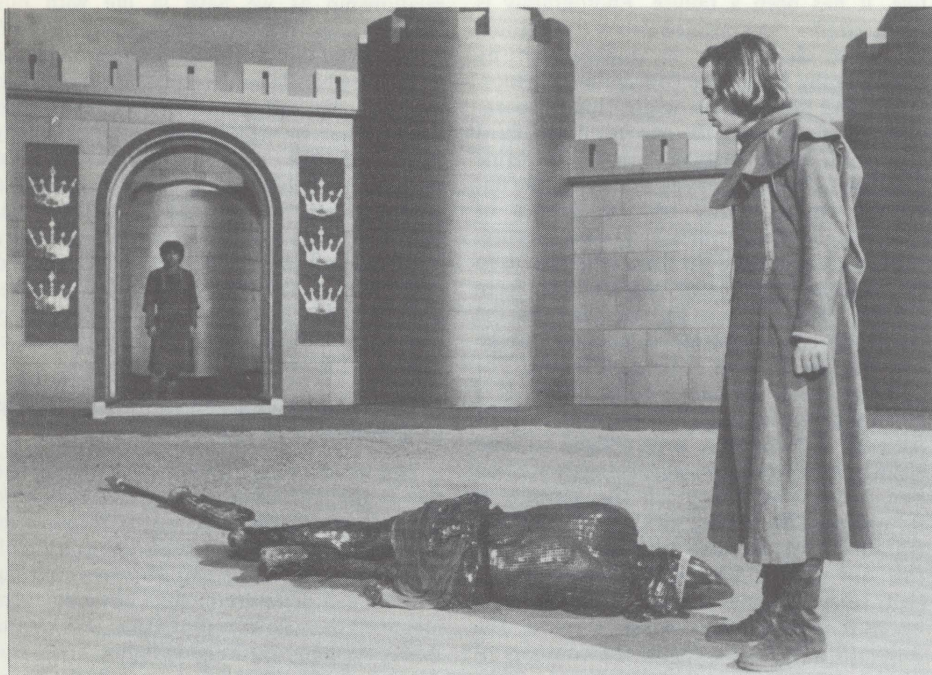
I don't mind. I'll be surprised if it happens with *Perceval*, though, partly because it doesn't pretend to the spatial realism of the earlier film. And there is in medieval art no pathos, none of that rather weepy, sentimental side of the 18th century, which may well strike us as comical today. *Perceval* is very far from that, it's more poetic, more *fantastique*, even. The stylisation is much stronger, although not constant; I didn't want it to become stilted or artificial. As to gesture, in medieval art it is always very stylised. A hand, for instance, is always shown stretched wide open, you'll rarely see one closed. So I sought an overall system of gesticulation which would justify every such movement. And finding the key was less tricky than I thought. I observed that it was enough to pivot the forearm around the elbow, keeping the elbow close to the body and never moving the upper arm.

In *Die Marquise von O...*, the actors made dramatic, declamatory gestures—an arm stretched out, a forefinger pointed accusingly, and so on. These are 18th century gestures *par excellence*, Roman or revolutionary gestures, if you like. Whereas in the Middle Ages, no matter what the situation, the expressive movement is always governed by the elbow remaining tight against the body. By constantly thinking of this code, the actors soon managed to arrive at a natural style; and during the year in which we rehearsed they would practise it every day, like scales. As I say, I avoided systematisation. *Perceval* himself is depicted as a man of nature, a *naïf* whose reactions are quite spontaneous, and he was permitted a great deal of freedom in his gestures. The courtiers and musicians, on the other hand, who represent the *manners* of a society—and this was an excessively mannered, precious society—adhered much more rigidly to the code. So gesture sets up an



PERC





FEVAL



'My aim was . . . to visualise the events Chrétien narrated as medieval paintings or miniatures might have done . . . I decided that if I was going to stylise the image, it wouldn't be by photography but by the conception of décor.'—ERIC ROHMER



opposition between Perceval, who is unversed in courtly manners, and the ladies and gentlemen of breeding. But it was never a question of slavishly imitating earlier works of art, it was a means of access to a new kind of expression which enabled us to rediscover—in particular, with the women—a certain behavioural grace, close to that of the dance and now quite obsolete. Women today behave as they please, unlike those of earlier periods on whom a strict etiquette of gesture was imposed.

It seems that the actors were not only called upon to speak their lines, but also to comment on their actions.

Yes. In the text of *Perceval* there is a narrative which I found so beautiful that I decided to keep it, instead of merely filming the actions it depicts. The Grail, for instance. It might have been considered enough in a film version to show it. Not for me: I wanted it to be described in Chrétien's own words. In fact, the Grail is a poor example, since it's quite straightforwardly done: there is a voice commenting off. But in other passages characters shift from the first to the third person and vice versa; even, on occasion, adding 'says he'. Well, it poses no problem. Perceval will say, 'Make of me a knight, says he.' During rehearsals the actor, Fabrice Lucchini, was afraid to say 'says he'. He would alter his voice, lower it. He would try to swallow the words. So I had him say, 'Make of me a knight, says he' all in the same tone and exactly as if the character were speaking every word. It's fine, I assure you. No problem at all. I'm certain that, after perhaps a few uneasy moments, the spectator will cease to notice it. There were passages concerning Perceval that I had originally given to a chorus—for instance, 'And he who has no sense of day, nor of hour, nor of time, replies: What day is it?' Well, now it is Perceval himself who comments on his otherworldliness. Or Gauvain, when courting a young girl, will say, 'He is alone with the maiden.'

Is this said to the girl or is it spoken to the camera?

To her. It's part of their conversation. Instead of a long dialogue scene between them in which they might express their love for each other, I simply have her say, 'Of love they speak without end.' It's all quite natural, especially after the beginning of the film which is sung, more or less, which is more like an opera. The first few minutes are extremely stylised. When Perceval appears, saying, 'And he throws his lances in the air, one behind him, one in front, one up, one down,' it could hardly be more artificial. He doesn't even throw the lances, in fact. He merely speaks of throwing them. But, as a style, that seemed a little too balletic; afterwards, the film becomes progressively 'naturalistic'.

When I saw the décor it appeared equally false, more like some enormous maquette than a proper set.

But the décor, too, will end up by appearing natural to the spectator. There is in this film, you see, a stylisation of forms but a realism of space. I pondered for a long time on the problem of representing in three dimensions the flat, one-dimensional space of medieval paintings. In my opinion, whenever *cinéastes* have attempted to flatten perspec-

tive, it has been a failure. Photography is photography. So I decided that if I was going to stylise the image, it wouldn't be by photography but by the conception of décor. I had the idea, which might appear paradoxical, of rendering the absence of the third dimension by an exaggeration of that same dimension. Which is to say, rendering the flat by the curved. After all, the frames of medieval paintings aren't always square. They're frequently in the form of letters, as in the famous illuminated manuscripts from Ireland. When this is so, the edges of the frame, which are generally ornamental, weigh very heavily on what is depicted within. The painting seems to curve under them. If a painted character finds himself, as it were, at the edge of the frame, he is obliged to bend slightly, as if a pressure were being exerted on him. Now the shape of the cinema is rectangular. No getting away from that. But what I did was to curve the whole set—for it was one unique set—into a semi-circle so that, when a character walks straight ahead, his walk must in fact describe a curve. The trees, the castles also follow the contours of the set. I don't suppose the spectator will be particularly conscious that everything is revolving, but he'll doubtless feel it as a general impression.

Are there any false perspectives?

None. I didn't want to do what Laurence Olivier did in *Henry V*. The film was shot in an entirely realistic manner. The towers may be much smaller than life-size but they are recognised as such. They stand firmly on the ground, or rather the studio floor, one can walk around them, there is absolutely no attempt at *trompe l'œil*. My first decision was that everything should be practical. One should be able to climb the stairs or live in the castles, however small. The horses just manage to pass through the castle gates, but they *do* pass. We believe it.

Truffaut once remarked, à propos of historical films, that he was willing to accept the existence of cameras in the Middle Ages, or whenever, but not the existence of zooms. Did you decide from the outset on a definite style of photography and lighting?

All the work went into the décor. Once the set had been constructed, we shot it as we might have shot a modern one. There are no *visual* effects. Except, of course, that *Perceval* was photographed in a manner completely opposed to Nestor Almendros' previous film, *La Chambre Verte*, which Truffaut wanted all in *chiaroscuro*. We were looking for a much more evenly spread light. Not that we deliberately set out to avoid shadows, on the grounds that there were none in medieval paintings. It's simply that the set, as constructed, cast very few shadows; even if we had wanted them, it would have been awkward. By using lots of gold—on the walls, for instance—we couldn't help but obtain an effect of flatness without shadows. But, thanks again to the curve, I don't think one ever has the impression of a backdrop.

How did the actors manage to establish a relationship with such an artificial, toy-like décor?

It's a very different one from the relationship with the real world, or even when one is filming in exteriors. In *Perceval*, the actors hardly *touch* the décor. There is no tactile

relationship as we have in life with our surroundings. When the characters are seated on the dainty little benches we had made for them, they hardly seem to sit at all, they sit on the very edge and place almost no weight on them. What we were trying to generate, by means of this airiness, was a kind of magnetism between actors and décor, a perpetual play of attraction and repulsion, especially when they move. A certain distance is maintained. A rider on horseback is forced each time to take the same curving route. Even in the interiors, space is emphasised by numerous curved corridors, arches, colonnades and so on. This creates tension.

Do the battle scenes resemble those in films by Eisenstein or Welles?

Not at all. First, because they aren't like that in the text. Chrétien generally says little more than, 'Useless for me to recount yet another battle.' It's always the same, after all, and it obviously bored him. He wasn't writing a *chanson de geste*. In the film, however, there are no ellipses: you see the battles, you see the lances clashing, the knights falling dead. But it's very rapid. It's all over in a flash. There are no frightful open wounds visible, almost no blood. Except once at the very beginning, when Perceval, still very young and cruel, unlearned in chivalry, pierces a knight's eye with his lance. In the context of the film this is an extremely strong moment, but again it's very, very rapid. And it all ties in with the set, which is simplified in accordance with Chrétien and medieval art. A tree stands for a forest, stands for several forests, in fact; the same castle is used for many different castles. Only the interiors change. And in the battle scenes, finally, very few knights participate.

For such a complicated film the shooting schedule was astonishingly short—eight weeks.

We rehearsed for a whole year, don't forget. Lucchini knew not only his own lines by heart but all the other roles. Everyone applied himself to the film with an extraordinary kind of devotion: Lucchini, for instance, took a job working nights for a TV repair company during the year of rehearsals. As it happens, we were able to bring the film in three or four days under schedule.

The characters of the *Contes Moraux* were gifted with intelligence and a capacity for articulating their problems which was—and still is—rare in the cinema. But *Perceval* is a naïf. Is he a Rohmerian hero?

I like Perceval, who is, I should say, closer to the feminine characters of the *Contes*. One could compare him perhaps to the *Collectionneuse*, in the rather insouciant way he collects his adventures.

One final question—for our English readers, as they say. If *Perceval* may be considered part of a series, is there any chance of your choosing an English classic?

Who knows? Stevenson, I might enjoy filming. But there is the problem of the language. My German, you know, is very weak, but that didn't bother me during the shooting of *Die Marquise von O...* I had learned all the classics at school so that, even if I spoke it badly, it was good German that I was speaking. Unfortunately, I have no knowledge of English at all. And the English literature I know best is American detective stories...

FESTIVALS '78



TAORMINA

Moths, briefly but startlingly illuminated by television lights, committed spectacular harakiri, while a hundred feet below, on a makeshift stage, a sixty-piece orchestra belted out celebratory tunes. There was also a modern ballet company and a transvestite singer in a leotard, the whole performance bouncily orchestrated by a double act called Enzo and Lello, who periodically pulled people out of the audience to make long-distance telephone calls to bemused subscribers. The show ended with an improvised *son et lumière*, as twelve thousand excited Sicilians lit tapers and Taormina's Greco-

Roman theatre was dramatically floodlit. Poor Marco Leto, whose *I vecchi e i giovani* was supposed to follow that.

Taormina, now bidding to be ranked as Italy's major festival, knows how to close a show. Last year, apparently, Etna obliged with an impromptu fireworks display for the opening night; this year the volcano merely smoked sulkily on the horizon. The town itself is perched on rocks 700 feet above the sea, a toytown in space. For a festival this imposing location presents certain logistical difficulties, not least for the press who, installed in sea-level hotels, are faced with a vertiginous climb and not a little organisational enterprise in order simply to see the films. The atmosphere carries, requires even,

a certain Mediterranean fatalism: screenings can be up to an hour late in starting, and even the near-perfect acoustics of an open-air Greek theatre are hard put to cope with the constant shuffle of feet as audiences wander in and out and children play Sicilian hopscotch in the aisles.

Such a setting invites audience participation. Noises off naturally punctuated Werner Schroeter's **Regno di Napoli**, an episodic history of a Neapolitan street community from 1943 to 1970 which must have raised several local echoes. Patchwork in style and format, Schroeter's film is a kind of politicised soap opera. Characters flit in and out, periodically impinging on each other's lives; external events, which sometimes involve them directly and sometimes pass them by, are signposted by commentary or contemporary street posters. It is a film which deals in archetypes, in which the general and the particular mesh in a hazy symbolic mist. The wartime American presence in Naples, for instance, is rendered by an episode in which a woman's price for her daughter is a bag of U.S. Navy flour, on which the camera lingers as a black sailor awkwardly converses with his innocent catch; shades of *Paisà* don't flatter this new version of an old theme. Occasionally the film does pointedly represent the compromises with honour and dignity forced on the dispossessed by the need simply to make ends meet in this battered city. But its blend of Technicolor neo-realism and tuppence-coloured fantasy too often edges it uncomfortably off course.

Schroeter's film took the main award, which many felt should have gone to Phillip Noyce's **Newsfront**. This Australian film is also told in episodes and also blends fiction and history, but it has the narrative authority to support its necessarily sketchy framework. It begins diffusely, hovering round the personalities of two rival newsreel companies at the time of the postwar influx of immigrants into Australia. Then the focus settles on Cinetone's chief cameraman (Bill Hunter), on whose efforts depends the company's struggle to keep afloat in the face of its rival's American capital and the eventual threat of television—succinctly registered when the small screen news carries a shot of the cameraman filming a bush fire, a humiliation compounded when his own footage is doctored because he didn't get in close enough.

Noyce weaves actual newsreels into his fictional fabric with enough dexterity to ensure that the edges don't show; and for good measure restages a devastating flood which begins with the impersonality of a distant disaster and ends in a personal catastrophe as the cameraman's assistant is fatally involved in his own 'story'. An authentic, hard-edged tribute to the newsreel, the film also turns a sharp eye on a society under stress: the dying of the newsreel parallels the uneasy blurring of a country's image of itself. 'He's just a bit old-fashioned,' someone says at the end as the cameraman refuses to sell out to the big American money. *Newsfront* is just a bit old-fashioned, and all the better for it.

Noyce's film is political, in the sense that its narrative constantly implies a political nuance. Two other films served up politics crude and paranoid. Roger Donaldson's **Sleeping Dogs**, from New Zealand, posits a state of emergency and a resistance move-



Above: Ahmed El Maaoui's 'Alyam Alyam'. Below: Istvan Gaal's 'Legato'

ment into which a would-be drop-out (back to nature with a dog on a private island) is reluctantly recruited. Action here speaks louder than dialogue—and more expensively, courtesy of the New Zealand airforce, which fires off what looks like the country's entire defence budget at a handful of dissidents trapped in a wood. Orwellian undertones (the hero is called Smith) are drowned by the noise.

Even more shrill is André Cayatte's *La Raison d'état*, in which a pacifist biology professor is murdered when he stumbles on incriminating evidence of a French arms deal with an African state and his credulous colleague (Monica Vitti) takes up the mantle in the cause of peace and justice. The script plummets into the lower depths of conspiracy theory infantilism, doing grievous damage to its good intentions. The death blow is a scene when Vitti, installed in a hotel on the night before she is to reveal all at a press conference, is gulled into inviting the villain of the piece up to her room. 'Cretina,' muttered a woman behind me, definitively.

After all this huffing and puffing it was a relief to turn to the quieter waters of Istvan Gaal's *Legato*, a chamber piece about the disruption of illusions. A young couple break off their holiday to visit a small town where the man's father, a resistance hero, had been hidden during the war. They spend the night in a house occupied by three elderly sisters, each of whom harbours a private memory of this wartime martyr. The rambling house, almost a character in itself, is a sustaining haven of faded photographs and dusty bric-à-brac; and the unexpected presence of the young couple reopens old wounds, bandaged for thirty years by convenient fantasies as fake as the Lautrec painting which is the house's treasure. Thematically reminiscent of *Spider's Stratagem*, Gaal's film is slighter and less beguilingly resonant (it is adapted from a play and occasionally betrays its dramatic curtain lines). But its apparently casual surface masks an intricacy of nuance which elegantly embroiders its point about the past as another country, a territory of the mind whose sustenance is the deception of dreams.

Jon Jost's *Chameleon* also deals in dreams, of a very different colour. Doodling round a central character (Bob Gaudini) who pushes drugs in Los Angeles and on the side engages in some shady art dealing, Jost constructs a crazy fabric of primary colours and mooning monologues. This is self-conscious cinema, at times recalling the abstract expressionism of Jackson Pollock as the camera fastens on paints oozing out of cans or picks out the neon kaleidoscope of a night-time street while a meaningless incantation drones on the soundtrack like some transcendental mantra. As its title implies, the film is nominally about role-playing, with the character who floats hazily round its centre changing colour (literally in one sequence, in which he howls Ginsberg-fashion in front of a window as he pours paint over himself) to suit his mood and mostly desultory purpose. Gene Youngblood appears fleetingly at an art preview—Jost's acknowledgment, presumably, to the notion of 'expanded cinema'. And when *Chameleon* works, it is precisely at those moments when it expands beyond the frontiers of conventional narrative film, when it explodes with colour and light and exposes the materials of film-making. Too often, though, the 'arbitrary' nature of these

privileged moments is undermined by the need to house them, however precariously, within the confines of a fiction.

The role-seeking, Pirandellian quality of Jost's film was appropriate in a festival which honoured the Sicilian dramatist with a retrospective. Elsewhere, Taormina seems to have contracted the current festival disease of elephantiasis, with too many indifferent films nudging each other for screening time. (Several of the better films in the festival's 'new cinema' section, it should be said, were also at Cannes and have already been reported in these pages.) No point in chronicling mediocrity, though one should perhaps bemoan the fact that Britain could offer nothing better in competition than Paul Morrissey's vacuous *Hound of the Baskervilles*.

But one film does deserve a final few words. *Alyam Alyam* (*O the Days*) comes from Morocco, and is set in the rural hinterland below Casablanca. The theme is timeless: a boy's conflicting loyalties between his ambition to live in the city and his family's need of him at home. For long periods the camera simply settles on the land and its work, the men in the sun-baked fields and the women weaving and kneading in the shade of their proud homes. The pace is the pace of the subject, to the extent that the film is in part a kind of meditation on the hard labour and simple values of this way of living. There is also the lure of France, and the stories which have filtered back about its manners and its prices—a fairy land to the older people, but a not too distant attraction to the generation unaffected by the colonial legacy. But the interest here is not fake pastoral or ethnographic exotic; the film's contemplation of objects, and the way it has of picking up fragments of everyday dialogue, situates its apparently spare narrative framework in a reality which becomes almost tangible. It reminded me, in its hypnotic concentration, of the films of Sohrab Shalid Saless. The director is Ahmed El Maaoui. This is his first feature, and it deserves to be seen outside the festival circuit.

DAVID WILSON

ZAGREB

The first animation get-together since the death of Zelimir Matko at only 48 took place in Zagreb, home of the studio Matko so brilliantly trumpeted throughout the world. That chuckling, wily, glowing personality has left an awful void. It was impossible not to imagine him smiling benignly upon the impeccable organisation of this third Zagreb Festival—and professing astonishment that half the awards should cascade upon the Yugoslav hosts.

Old festivaliers who remembered Zagreb 74 glanced at their programmes and instantly tipped that the final film on show would once again collect the Grand Prix. Sure enough, the winner was Zagreb's *Satiemania*, a dexterous display by Zdenko Gašparović of graphic variations on themes inspired by Satie's music. For all its skill, the film suffers the same hollow quality as Dragić's *Diary*, as if an idea for an agreeable doodle has been over-inflated to guarantee festival accolades. A more original contribution from Zagreb's own studio was Joško Marušić's *Perpetuo*, in which millions of ant-like people survive the most disruptive re-patterning. The animation

was no less startling than the concept. Zlatko Grgić offered something new, too, with a splendidly subversive addition to the usually bland Balthazar series. *A Sporting Life* is surely the first in which Balthazar doesn't triumph. He merely pops up to deputise for the real hero, Grgić's immortal cat, when he escapes the clutches of a health freak aunt.

John Weldon and Eunice Macaulay's *Special Delivery* was the deserved favourite among the international entries. This National Film Board of Canada production is a black comedy about the aftermath of the death of a mailman who slips on the icy steps which a wife has asked her husband to sweep. The sheer deftness of the animation piles one complication upon another in eight hilarious minutes. In live action the same delicious story might have taken four times as long and been about a quarter as funny.

The jury, who awarded *Special Delivery* first prize in its section, seemed to avert their gaze from *Tragic Destiny*, a delirious French debut by Phil, who accompanied 'the animated adventure of Riri the spermatozoid' with Wagner, Mozart and Wolfe. Poor Riri and his friends are last seen vanishing down a bidet plughole, but a mind-boggling rumour insisted that this is the first of a series...

Outrage was in this year. Few programmes were without animated genitalia, and Spain's *A Long Time Ago—Or More*, by Jorge Amoros, offered bloodbath battling between rival ape factions which might make Peckinpah quail. The jury nervously gave it a special prize 'for animation'. A prize for graphics went to Jeff Carpenter's *Rapid Eye Movements*, 'a short story of Jung love' which provided one of the festival's more hallucinatory experiences. Action—sometimes startlingly erotic—is glimpsed rather than seen, and dialogue becomes one more sound effect. The first viewing provokes an instant desire to see it again; so does the second.

Another American entry, Paul Kim and Lew Gifford's *Queerdom*, told a tale of conversion from straight to gay so outrageously that the consensus—when people stopped laughing—was that judgment must depend entirely upon which camp, so to speak, could claim the authors. It seemed apt that the admirable retrospectives—Felix, Luzzati and Gianini, Doubrava-Macourek-Born—should be dominated by two programmes of the best of that kind of outrage, Tex Avery, lovingly prepared and presented by Greg Ford.

The jury mysteriously neglected a Dutch entry, Borge Ring's *Oh My Darling*, a tale of a father's love for his daughter in which a refreshing romanticism is expressed in the simplest of styles. It equally surprisingly failed to recognise the remarkable talent of Ian Emes, whose *Free Fall*, *Heart's Right*, *Oriental Night Fish* and *I Told You So* were all on show. Indeed British animation, accustomed to having a hard time at Annecy, suffered quite baffling treatment this year at Zagreb. Two of the best British animated shorts for years, *Hokusai* and *Max Beeza and the City in the Sky*, received inexplicable rejection letters—yet on the spot sorrow was expressed that these films had never been submitted. Enquiries continue, no one being more eager to unravel the mystery than the meticulous secretariat of the National Panel for Film Festivals.

DEREK HILL

JOHN FORD'S WILDERNESS



THE MAN WHO SHOT LIBERTY VALANCE

David F. Coursen

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance has been so widely discussed, dissected and applauded that by now it must rank as one of John Ford's least under-appreciated films. Its reputation is due in no small part to the obvious feeling Ford invested in the project, making of it his final meditation on a large part of the mythic territory which he invented and embellished in more than four decades of film-making. *Liberty Valance* is particularly interesting for the explicit way it juxtaposes a characteristic Ford frontier West (cf. *My Darling Clementine*) with another West that, with its contemporary technology—telephones, electric fans and smoking train engines—is recognisably modern. Significantly, just as the 'past' sequences are, apart from the explicitly revisionist world of *Cheyenne Autumn*, Ford's parting look at the frontier, so too the 'modern' sequences are, apart from a brief vignette in *Donovan's Reef*, his parting glance towards contemporary America.

The standard critical approach to *Liberty Valance* has been to emphasise the contrasts between its two worlds and to articulate how it celebrates the mythic frontier and mourns its passing and its betrayal by the corrupting forces of progress. This approach has produced a substantial body of perceptive commentary on the film, but somehow its operative word—'elegiac'—seems inadequate, implicitly neglecting as it does

Ford's ambivalence towards the past and the richness and complexity of his treatment of the post-frontier West.

Like many Ford films—most obviously those dealing with the military—*Liberty Valance* focuses on the need to subordinate the individual will to a collective struggle for some greater good. *Liberty Valance*, however, not only presents such a struggle, to civilise the frontier, but explicitly shows its outcome,

Above: Ransome 'Ranse' Starks (James Stewart) and Hallie Gates (Vera Miles) come back to Shinbone



The restaurant kitchen: Tom Doniphon (Wayne) brings Hallie (Vera Miles) the cactus rose

the modern Shinbone, and questions whether it justifies the sacrifices it required. In this sense, the film is perfectly congruent with the notion of a Ford who became increasingly bitter and pessimistic with age, and who ultimately challenged many of the moral tenets his earlier films had so eloquently affirmed. But what is not so well understood about *Liberty Valance* is its awareness of the fact that the modern world is not simply a betrayal of what preceded it, that the flow of history is organic, the present an extension of the past. Ultimately, Ford professes faith in neither wilderness nor garden; he has considerable affection for the past, but no real belief in the viability of a society based on untrammelled individualism. Thus he undercuts his celebration of the mythic past with a corrosive revisionism that, far more than any lines of quotable dialogue, demonstrates his commitment to confronting and scrutinising, rather than simply printing, the legend that is the subject of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*.

The extent of Ford's willingness to question, if not actually to discard, even the most sacred American myths and ideals comes into vivid focus in a relatively straightforward, almost didactic scene midway through the film. This sequence takes place in the new school in the frontier community of Shinbone, where teacher Ranse Stoddard (James Stewart) presides over a virtual western miniature of the American melting pot. The class day begins with a group of Mexican children singing the ABC Song while their patriarch, buffoonish town marshal Link Appleyard (Andy Devine), beams his approval. This is followed by a brief description of the American political system as one in which 'da people are da boss', by the Swedish-accented Nora Erickson (Jeanette Nolan). Even the make-shift schoolroom where this is taking place seems like a veritable museum of Americana: written on the blackboard, a converted stagecoach schedule, are the words 'Education is the basis of law and order', and the walls are adorned with likenesses of Washington and Lincoln, and even a crudely drawn American flag. When the next question is addressed to the class's token Negro, Pompey (Woody Strode, here looking as Uncle Remus as Ford could make him), and he stands up so that his face shares the frame with the likeness of the Great Emancipator himself, the scene seems ready to succumb to a terminal case of galloping flag-waving.

At this point, a peculiar thing happens to the storybook civics lesson. As Pompey begins his recital, his illiteracy betrays him and he says 'was writ' instead of 'was written'. But Ranse, who did not interrupt Nora's recital or comment on her garbled syntax (leaving the corrections to a zealous student), immediately corrects Pompey's error, interjecting 'was written, Pompey'. More to the point, he delivers the correction in an exasperated, almost patronising tone of voice, his manner cool and even slightly intimidating. In short, Ranse speaks to Pompey with very little of the folksy warmth or good-natured tolerance he shows everyone else in the room, even visitors ill-mannered enough to wear hats or light pipes in the classroom. Further, Ford acknowledges this difference, punctuating the correction by cutting from Pompey to a slightly asymmetrical shot of Ranse, sternly seated at his desk, and viewed from an angle used in no other context in the scene. The rest of the recitation is fragmented into alternating shots of an uncertain Pompey vainly struggling to finish, and a stern Ranse, making corrections and discouraging another student from helping Pompey, who never *does* manage to finish. Both James Stewart's delivery and the visual treatment of the exchange suggest, without ever quite insisting, that the teacher, so supportive of everyone else in the class, is subtly, perhaps unconsciously, patronising his black student. Thus when Pompey apologises for forgetting the self-evident truth 'that all men are created equal', Ranse's reply, 'that's all right, Pompey, a lot of people forget that part of it', is more ironic than he knows.

The sequence is just unsettling enough that when Tom Doniphon (John Wayne), Pompey's master/employer/companion, bursts into the classroom and sends his 'boy' back to work, our response is curiously ambivalent. The overt content of the civics lesson, with its statements of faith in universal education, law and egalitarian democracy, makes the act of denying a black man access to education reprehensible. But Pompey's actual position in the classroom, where he is more completely servile, more truly a boy in demeanour and circumstance than anywhere else in the film, suggests that Tom may not be doing him such a disservice after all.

In the early Shinbone, before or after the coming of 'law and order', Pompey cannot eat in a restaurant, drink in a saloon, or vote in a town meeting. It is only when Valance comes on to the scene, forcibly imposing 'Western law' at its crudest—a man settles his own problems—that Pompey becomes important. In such circumstances, he advances—literally as well as figuratively—from the fringes of the action (as he lounges outside the town meeting, he is so near the edge of the frame that in some 16 mm prints he is only partially visible) to its centre; he carries himself with a dignity, a cool self-possession, that is in stark contrast to his shuffling servility elsewhere. In fact, in the restaurant, when Ford cuts from the face-off between Tom and arch-villain Liberty Valance (Lee Marvin) to Pompey, the black man is not only shown self-assuredly cradling his gun, but explicitly pictured as the defender of the Ericksons, the film's nuclear family. Hallie (Vera Miles) stands next to Pompey, while Nora and Peter (John Qualen) huddle together in the background, in obvious terror. Even more dramatically, he is the defender of

democracy; it is the sound of Pompey cocking his rifle that marks the end of Valance's effort to use violence to take over the town meeting and thus subvert democracy.

Another detail of the classroom sequence is significant; in the ABC recital the eight children pictured most prominently are all Mexican, one of them with so little knowledge of English that he even uses Spanish to ask permission to go to the lavatory. Through the rest of the story, Shinbone's Mexican-American community is treated as a period detail; but it is a detail that is conspicuously missing from the modern town, where there is no hint—not even a stray Irish brogue—of ethnic diversity. The overall tone of the schoolroom sequence is still affectionate enough to suggest that Ford approves of the proceedings, but not without recognising that it is sacred ideals like education, no less than tainted ones like 'progress', that have shaped the world of the modern Shinbone.

Ford's misgivings about the past are partially obscured by the obvious pleasure he takes in re-creating the early Shinbone, where everything, from the steaks in a restaurant to the drunkenness of the newspaper editor, Dutton Peabody (deliriously overplayed by Edmund O'Brien), to Liberty Valance's villainy, is larger than life. Adding to the local colour are a monumentally incompetent town marshal, an assortment of stuttering cowhands, drunks, Swedes, Mexicans, and even an eastern tenderfoot. By contrast, the modern town is drab and efficient; Link hasn't been elected marshal 'for a dog's age', and even the trains—uniquely in Ford's films—run on time.

The differences between the two Shinbones are neatly summarised by their respective newspaper editors. Where O'Brien's Peabody, founder of the Shinbone *Star*, is often almost uncontrollably idiosyncratic, his staggering bombast and crusading fervour alike fuelled by alcohol, his successor, Maxwell Scott (Carleton Young), is cool, soft-spoken, and presumably efficient—his wrinkled coat notwithstanding. Peabody has a passion for truth; his only question about the newsworthiness of a story is 'do you know that for a fact?' and not even the virtual certainty of physical harm can deter him from printing the truth. By contrast, the modern editor suppresses a news item, the true story of Valance's death, with the pragmatic explanation: 'This is the West, sir. When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.'

Just before he speaks these words, Scott picks up the notebook containing the story, tears out the pages, crumples them up and throws them into a stove. In so doing, he unwittingly echoes one of the key gestures of the film. Previously, Liberty Valance twice uses the same gesture. After a stagecoach hold-up he tears the pages from a law book, throws them to the ground and savagely beats young lawyer Stoddard as a lesson about the West—'Western law'. Later, Valance takes a copy of the *Star*, teaching its editor about truth and protesting at an editorial by crumpling the pages, stuffing them into Peabody's mouth, and beating the editor and destroying the newspaper office. Thus when the modern editor of the same paper uses this particular set of gestures, the action reverberates with a feeling of betrayed idealism comparable to that when, after learning of

Valance's approach, Ranse himself erases 'Education is the basis of law and order' from the blackboard and then crumples the copy of the *Star* he had been using as a classroom textbook in democracy. Ostensibly, the editor's gesture suggests that the new society which Peabody, with his devotion to truth, had helped to shape now demands that the truth be suppressed. But the repetition of the paper-crumpling in its various contexts actually suggests a basic continuity between past and present; truth has always subverted the social order and, in the past as in the present, has necessarily been suppressed to preserve 'Western law'.

Ford's ambivalence towards the mythic past is also evident in a comparison between the physical environments in which he places the two towns. The early Shinbone is a nocturnal settlement, conspicuously an extension of the desert that surrounds it. The modern town is sunny and peaceful, the streets dusty but the yards almost lush with leafy trees and shrubs. Further, while the first shots of the modern town are of a train crossing a verdant landscape, the past is introduced by a scene set in a malignant nightscape where Valance and friends are about to rob a stagecoach. Virtually all the early action in the past happens at night, and it is not until the schoolroom sequence that a scene takes place entirely during daylight hours. (Or, for that matter, that there is any evidence that children live in Shinbone; it is difficult to imagine a place less suited to the Fordian ideal of raising children—and therefore more in need of change—than the nocturnal wilderness settlement.) Throughout the film, Ford uses day and night with an insistence that is almost schematic: the stagecoach hold-up, the spilled dinner and the final shoot-out (where Tom, not Ranse, kills Valance) all take place at night; the schoolroom sequence, the town meeting, the statehood convention and Tom Doniphon's funeral all take place during the day.

The use of the day-night motif also gives the actions in the early Shinbone an almost dreamlike quality, comparable to that created by the larger-than-life features of the town. But surely the most dreamlike figure in the film is Liberty Valance, who seems at times like an hallucinated embodiment of pure evil. This effect is heightened by the presence of Valance's sidekick Floyd (Strother Martin at his sleaziest); his almost orgasmic squealing and writhing as he watches Valance beat Peabody makes him perhaps the most repulsive character in all Ford's films. It is almost as if such cosmic perversity could only be hallucinated. And this dreamlike quality is further enhanced by Valance's apparent exemption from the physical laws that govern movement through space. He is almost never shown actually arriving anywhere, though his presence may be signalled by a sound, as of horses when he arrives at the town meeting. More often he seems simply to materialise, as at the stagecoach hold-up, where he looms up out of a rock formation like some malignant force of nature. The most striking such apparition takes place in the newspaper office, when the drunken Peabody turns on a lamp and Valance and his men appear out of the darkness, occupying, almost without explanation, space that was empty when we last saw it. (There is a particular perversity to this scene, since in other Ford films it has

been a loved one—Maureen O'Hara in both *How Green Was My Valley* and *Rio Grande*—who has appeared in this way.) Similarly hallucinatory is Hallie and Nora's utter, gasping terror at the mere mention of Valance's name shortly after Ranse's arrival in Shinbone.

The absence of the Western landscape from *Liberty Valance* seems almost palpable. The very fact that the director of *The Searchers* and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*—to cite two obvious examples—chose to locate Shinbone in a black and white wilderness outside Monument Valley, and to include virtually no location shots, is itself basic to his definition of life in the wilderness. Virtually all the action takes place in the town, anticipating Ford's more forceful and encompassing use of visual confinement within the besieged mission in *Seven Women*. Shinbone is not as claustrophobic or as desperate as the mission, but both settings have about them the feeling of sanctuaries offering their residents an all too precarious protection from the terrors of life outside.

Ford's rigorous control of the use of location shots also helps focus the questions of territoriality that motivate much of the conflict in the film. The argument over statehood, for example, centres on the question of whether or not the territory's cattle barons will retain control of the area to rule it 'by their high-handed ideas, whatever they are', that is, by 'Western law'. The struggle focuses on the differences between the land north and south of the Picketwire River that divides the territory. But beyond these broad political questions, since the only location shots in the story of the early Shinbone are in the desert, and almost all those at or near the site of Tom's ranch, the film's wilderness is rather directly and exclusively linked to and by extension owned by Tom, as a kind of personal possession. Further, the one scene that takes place in Valance's part of the desert, the stagecoach hold-up, is very conspicuously filmed on a sound stage so grotesque and unreal that it could only belong to Valance.

Doniphon, Valance and the cattle barons

evidently retain control over the wilderness by closing it to everyone else. Townspeople who venture into the desert do so at their own risk; Valance makes his living shooting sodbusters and robbing travellers. By so explicitly making the land the personal domain of a small group, Ford articulates a central paradox of the 'natural' state of the wilderness; there is something almost perverted in a Western, particularly a Ford Western, about the existence of all that land and its visual exclusion from the film. More directly, there is something distorted and unnatural about a society, however 'free', which is so anarchic that ordinary people cannot live on the land. The need to make the land inhabitable by transforming it from the personal domain of a handful of individuals into the collective property of that most abstract entity 'the People' makes a most compelling argument for the coming of statehood, the railroad, and civilisation itself.

These changes are epitomised by the trains that open and close the film, crossing the landscape they have done so much to transform. The presence of those trains suggests just how important transport has been as both a catalyst and a measure of change. The individuals most displaced by change, Tom and Liberty, are both closely linked to the horses that the trains have replaced. Tom first appears in the film riding into town and leading a wagon. Near the end of the film, even as his ranch is burning, he reminds Pompey to release the horses in a nearby corral. The only other recognisable riders in the film are Valance and his associates as they ride through Shinbone, shooting up the town at random. Townspeople travel by wagon or stagecoach, or later by train. The only time Valance uses a conveyance as civilised as a wagon is when, after his death, he is carried out of town in one.

Even at the territorial convention, shortly after Valance's death, the horse that appears is so domesticated it drinks water from a pitcher—reduced, like the stagecoach Ranse uses to introduce his story, to a prop to evoke the frontier. The very fact that the horse is a mere prop suggests that the frontier has

Doniphon (Wayne), Ranse Stoddard (James Stewart) and Pompey (Woody Strode) in one of the exterior scenes at Doniphon's ranch



already passed into history, that Valance's death is of only symbolic importance.

Because change is as inevitable as it is impersonal, the real issue in Shinbone is not so much who will prevail as who will adapt to the changes that are already taking place. Valance and Doniphon, stagecoach robber and horse trader, alike find themselves trapped in obsolescent careers, each incapable of changing. Ranse, by contrast, is virtually defined by his professional adaptability. During his brief stay in Shinbone, he is shown or referred to as a lawyer, dishwasher, waiter, reporter, schoolteacher, election official, gunman and convention delegate-elect. Later in his career he becomes a delegate to Congress, governor, senator, ambassador, and possible vice-presidential aspirant (in short, virtually everything but what a lawyer might most reasonably aspire to become, a judge). Tom and Valance instinctively sense the importance of professional identity, often addressing Ranse in ways that refer to his occupation: 'Professor', 'Waitress', 'Hashslinger', 'Dishwasher', 'Mr. Attorney' and even 'Pilgrim', which may refer to professional as well as physical mobility. (The other steadily working survivor from the town's past, Clute Dumfries, the undertaker, also has a sign proclaiming *his* professional versatility.)

Ironically, it is not Ranse's adaptability but his idealism—which he discards—and his dreams of the future—which, when it arrives, is a corruption of his vision—that enable him to supplant Tom in the community and in Hallie's affections. This irony is underscored by the film's use of the 'Ann Rutledge Theme', which Ford first used in *Young Mr. Lincoln*.

Though the music is the same in both films, its context and effect differ considerably. In *Lincoln*, the music is consistently linked to Ann Rutledge, the love of Abe's youth. The first time the theme plays in *Liberty Valance* it seems to be used similarly: Hallie visits Tom's abandoned ranch, and the sight of the cactus roses there evokes his memory as the music begins. But when the same music is used in the flashback, it is associated not with Hallie's feelings for Tom, but with her belief in the ideals Ranse articulates. In *Lincoln* the theme evokes a consistent set of feelings, first for Ann and later for her memory and her dreams for Abe, which remain vital and will come to fruition when the mature Lincoln assumes his mythic role as the embodiment of America's highest ideals. In *Valance*, however, the theme is associated exclusively with feelings that are remote and idealised, whether for Tom's memory after his death, or for Ranse's hopes for the future, which are only imperfectly realised. The music is invariably linked to an ideal, promised or remembered, its melancholy sound and its context alike suggesting that ideals are, by their very nature, unattainable. Time inevitably betrays the dreams of youth and leaves only the sadness of age to recall the past and mourn its passing; thus, in the past, the music registers a hope for the future, and in the present, regret at the loss of the past.

In the story of the early Shinbone, the music is used first just before Tom arrives at the restaurant, when Hallie listens to Ranse rhapsodising about the joys of learning to read. It recurs shortly after as the two of them stand in the doorway and look at the cactus rose Pompey has just planted on Tom's

behalf; Hallie admires its beauty, while Ranse, speaking in a slightly bemused voice with just a hint of irony, talks of the greater beauty of a real rose. The music accompanies their conversation as Hallie expresses the hope that 'some day'—the same 'some day' that Texicans (*The Searchers*) and black cavalrymen (*Sergeant Rutledge*) have dreamed of in other Ford films—real roses will grow in Shinbone. The theme is used a third time as Hallie straightens the deserted classroom after she has argued with Tom and seen Ranse erase 'Education is the basis of law and order' and crumple his copy of the Shinbone *Star*. When she leaves the classroom, she calls first to Ranse, who does not hear her, and only later (and on Ranse's behalf) to Tom. The final flashback use of the music comes after the shoot-out as Hallie and Ranse acknowledge the bond that Ranse's facing of Valance (with Tom's still unrevealed help) has cemented between them. The exchange culminates in a two-shot which is finally interrupted by the sound of Tom's arrival; Ford holds the shot for such an abnormally long time after we hear the door open and see Hallie's reaction to his presence that the odd visual rhythm, as much as Tom's awkward manner, registers how completely his arrival is an intrusion.

In life, though not in death, Tom always remains somehow apart from or out of time with the music. As this suggests, the relationship between Tom and Hallie assumes its greatest emotional resonance only in memory; their love is ultimately unattainable. Despite Tom's best efforts, riding a wagon into town to come courting, giving Hallie a cactus rose, he is ultimately beyond domestication, his gestures, like his hat, somehow too large for the indoors. In addition, he seems always most out of place in the focal point of the film's family life, the restaurant kitchen, where he is forever receding into the back of the frame, or burning his hand on a coffeepot, or raising a bottle to his lips only to have Hallie grab it before he gets a drink. And virtually every time he enters the kitchen, he intrudes on some scene that marks the growing intimacy between Ranse and Hallie.

The film makes it clear that Ranse is the catalyst, rather than the cause, of Tom's estrangement from Hallie. This is evident from the differences between the two sequences in which Tom, using almost identical language, tells Hallie how pretty she is when she gets mad. The first such exchange, shortly after Ranse's arrival, is comic; as Hallie fumes about Shinbone's lawlessness and the marshal's incompetence, her words are explicitly intended neither to express anger towards Tom nor to appeal for Ranse's help. Tom's 'You're awfully pretty when you're mad', is shown in an extremely close two-shot of him and Hallie—perhaps the largest close-up in the film. Hallie's reaction is shown in an almost equally close shot of her face and Tom's shoulder. Her expression is not completely readable but it is clear that, on one level at least, she takes his words as a compliment that partially defuses her anger. Still, the very fact that the film cuts away from the direct two-shot, showing only Hallie's face as she responds, gives the exchange a slightly unsettled (and unsettling) quality.

The implications of tentativeness in this exchange come into clearer focus when the



'Tom even begins to act like Valance . . .': Lee Marvin, John Wayne

phrase comes up again after Tom, warning of Valance's imminent arrival, disrupts the school and tells Hallie to go home: 'I don't want you goin' to school in no shootin' gallery.' Ford cuts from a medium shot of the two of them to a medium close-up of Hallie alone for her reply: 'Now you listen to me, Tom Doniphon, where I go or what I do is none of your concern. You don't own me!' Clearly, this is anger directed towards Tom, but his reaction, shown also in medium close-up, includes the same boyish grin—now totally inappropriate—he had in the previous exchange. As he finishes speaking, 'Like I said, Hallie, you're awfully pretty when ya get mad,' he starts out of the room. This time there is no specific shot of Hallie's reaction, but her anger is evident even from a distance. More to the point, the fact that Tom's response is so inappropriate, as much as the fact that Hallie's reaction to it merits no special emphasis, suggests how much their relationship has deteriorated. Thus when Hallie leaves the room, she calls first after Ranse, appropriately since she will now look to him to bring law to the West and, as it turns out, get rid of Valance in the process.

On several other occasions, Ford is equally

reticent about linking Tom and Hallie visually. Shortly after Tom gives her the cactus rose, they meet in the doorway between the kitchen and dining room of the restaurant. He opens the bottom of the door for her and, as they pass, he compliments her beauty, finally saying, in a manner he intends as courtly but which is actually full of schoolboyish charm with a hint of embarrassment, 'Any more colour 'n' you'd be prettier than that cactus rose.' She stammers a reply, blushes and then, still within the same shot, she moves into the left foreground and then out of the frame into the kitchen while he stands watching her, passes through the door and into the right background, into the dining room where he will soon confront Valance over a ruined steak.

Shortly after that confrontation, in a scene in the kitchen, Tom walks towards Hallie and stands next to her, but does not touch her, as she works over the stove. When he tells her he is leaving town for a few days, she replies with a noncommittal 'Goodbye, Tom'. He remains in the room a moment longer, addressing his parting words and his gaze, which so often follows Hallie at other times in the film, towards Ranse and/or Peabody. Finally he turns and walks out, and Hallie, oddly compelled, then moves towards the door. In the following shot, in the alley outside, Tom moves through the right foreground and out of the frame. Hallie stands in the left background, in the centre of the lighted doorway, silently watching him move through the darkness, apparently unaware of her presence. Ford holds the shot after Tom disappears, perhaps further emphasising Tom's inability to see Hallie, and surely to freeze the image of the waiting woman in time. When Tom returns from his travels, nothing will be the same between them.

The next time Tom walks out of that kitchen door, after the shooting of Valance, his departure is more definitive. In that sequence, Tom—his arrival, Valance-like, taking place off-camera—intrudes on a prolonged two-shot of Ranse and Hallie virtually embracing; Tom's presence is encompassed by a single shot in which he moves forward into the room, speaks, turns, and walks out. This time, Hallie does not follow him outside, nor does light from the kitchen penetrate the darkness he enters.

Instead, in the following shot, perhaps the most elaborate in the film, Tom seems almost to move outside of time. It begins with him in the alley, outside the kitchen. He pauses and lights a match that rather eerily illuminates his face for a moment. Then he walks forward past the camera, which pivots to follow him as he moves into a silhouette momentarily almost as ghostly as the one that will introduce and conclude his flashback recreation of the actual shooting of Valance. Tom, now with his back to the camera, ponderously crosses the street, receding into the frame as he approaches the saloon/meeting hall. He walks past a wagon as Valance's body is lifted into it, and the camera, still without a cut, partially reverses its direction, leaving Tom and moving to the left to follow the wagon as it begins carrying Valance's remains out of town. The wagon, in fact, crosses almost the same ground that Tom's wagon covered as it carried the almost similarly inert Ranse into town after the stagecoach hold-up. The visual association of

Valance and his former victim, Ranse, formalises the outlaw's demise as surely as the continuity of the camera's gaze as it moves from Tom to Valance irrevocably links the two men, one condemned to wander between the winds, the other dead.

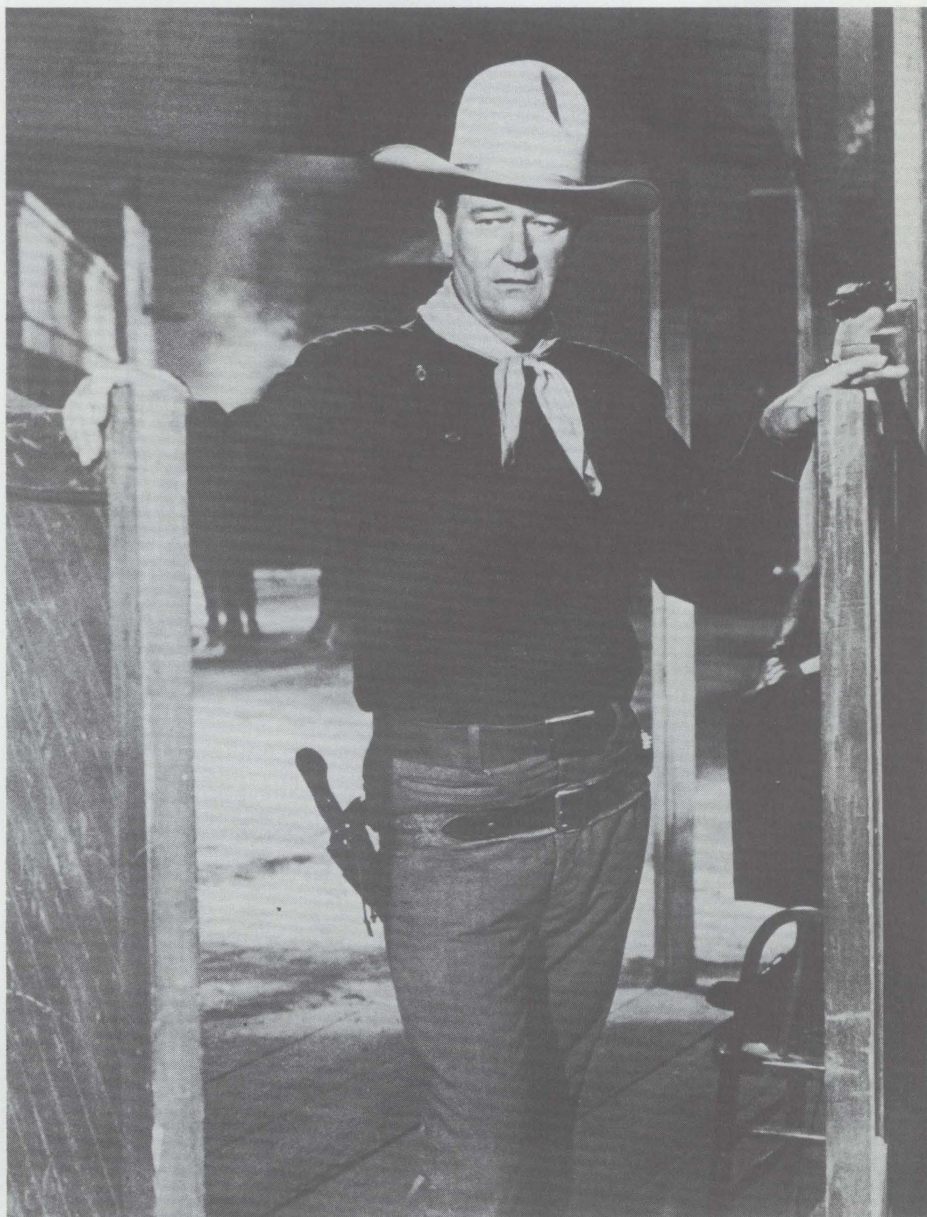
It is not surprising, then, that Tom even begins to act like Valance, tossing around chairs and money, breaking glass, and generally raising hell. Later he destroys his own home by tossing a lighted lamp—a lamp was virtually the only object Valance did not destroy as he ransacked the newspaper office—into some paint supplies and igniting a conflagration far more destructive than anything caused by Valance. This completes the process by which Tom is transformed from the self-assured horseman introduced riding into town to the unseen occupant of the stark wooden coffin that frames Ranse's story and spiritually dominates the film.

The presence of that coffin may evoke much of the feeling in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, but the film's universe is ultimately defined by the impersonal images that frame the film itself, the trains crossing the landscape they have helped to change in a process that has passed beyond the control of any individual will. As Ranse and Hallie talk together on the train, in a single

take, of Ranse's plans for retirement, Hallie reminds him of his achievements: 'Look at it. It was once a wilderness; now it's a garden. Aren't you proud?' Ranse replies with another question: 'Hallie, who put the cactus roses on Tom's coffin?' After Hallie acknowledges 'I did,' the two sit almost motionless, in a suspended moment that ends with the only cut of the sequence, to a slightly longer shot during which the camera moves in closer. Ranse reverts to his political identity as the conductor speaks to him. Finally, the conductor speaks the film's last, ironic words: 'Nothing's too good for the Man Who Shot Liberty Valance.'

As he hears those words, Ranse pauses, blows out the match that has not yet lighted his pipe, bows his head, and sits unmoving as the 'Ann Rutledge Theme'—now a meditation on his lost dreams—begins (to continue until the screen darkens). The cumulative effect of the sequence, the words, the gestures and the music, is almost overwhelmingly poignant. Ranse pauses to reflect on the falseness of his mythic identity, and to feel the emptiness of the accomplishments of a life spent in the service of the object whose image supplants him and ends the film: the train receding across the landscape that has become its garden. ■

The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance



WHICH WAY TO THE WAY AHEAD?

Britain's Years of Reconstruction

Geoff Brown



In the current critical climate, the appearance of the *Penguin Film Review* in a two-volume reprint by the Scholar Press may well seem a thoroughly redundant event—something which may prompt memories of the late 1940s but which hardly furthers or relates to British film culture of the present. Certainly the bulk of the articles printed in its nine issues (running from August 1946 to May 1949) fail to hold the attention now: wide topics are given cursory treatment and one rarely finds any film, director or genre inspected in any detail, or any film theory expounded or vigorously applied. In place of the current fondness for articles on rhetorical strategies and imaginary signifiers, the editor-in-chief Roger Manvell offered simple pieces on 'The Art of the Film Strip', 'The Cinema in Argentina' and 'The Music of *Hamlet* and *Oliver Twist*'—items which have now almost acquired the period bouquet and innocent naïveté of Film Annual revelations about hobbies of the stars or Margaret Lockwood's make-up secrets.

At the time of the *Review*, of course, there were no fashionable methods for film criticism; one of Manvell's editorials indeed pleaded for the establishment of film as an academic discipline, with all the intellectual rigours this implied. 'The film critic, as things are now,' he wrote in the seventh issue, 'has too often to invent his own bread-and-butter principles and muddle along with a few outworn critical platitudes about composition, movement, editing and synchronisation.' But this never happened in the lifetime of the *Review*; it is only within the last ten years that something other than critical platitudes, whether outworn or not, has emerged in British film culture.

Yet for all the sheer dullness and evanescence of most of its contributions, the *Penguin Film Review* remains of crucial significance. For there are few other cinema publications of the post-war period which capture so exactly the intense mood of enthusiasm and idealism that swept through Britain in the 40s. There was a clear feeling (soon to be thwarted) that British cinema, and indeed British culture generally, had come through the war with its head held high, and that the way ahead to even greater glories was clearly signposted in the years of reconstruction.

The *Review* had two chief companion journals. *SIGHT AND SOUND* at this period was beginning to break away from its original concern with the educational use of film. Like the *Review* it regularly offered hectic surveys of cinema trends the world over (the issue of Spring 1947 alone dealt with Italy, Germany, Cuba, Ceylon and Ecuador). Yet it didn't beat the drum for Britain and British culture with quite the same force as Manvell's publication; its readership then was also much more restricted than the general market reached by the *Review* (each issue of that sold roughly 25,000 copies). Neither the *Review* nor *SIGHT AND SOUND*, however, could match *Sequence* in liveliness, in breadth of reference and clarity of response to the films under discussion. *Sequence* first appeared in December 1946 from Oxford University and ran for fourteen issues (the last in 1952), providing the kind of positive, radical criticism that its fellow journals

Celia Johnson in 'Brief Encounter': a talisman for the adult British cinema

signally lacked. The American entertainment film (generally maligned elsewhere) was championed; extended surveys were devoted to favoured directors (Carné, Ford). *Sequence* even had the confidence to be frivolous, inviting readers to enter competitions where they could concoct credits for imaginary productions of *Paradise Lost* or *Howard's End*, or list the six most 'unwholesome' women of the screen (as expected, none of those entries could be printed). Yet for all the greater worth of its contributions, the magazine doesn't project its times as clearly as the *Review* does, particularly in its editorials and critical surveys on the country's new releases.

There were no frivolous competitions in the *Review*, for it was born of a different climate. The war decisively shaped both its format and its assumptions. Because of paper restrictions, the establishment of new magazines was forbidden, though there was a great need for fresh organs of debate and information. The new magazines that did begin were therefore thinly disguised as books, appearing roughly three times a year. Penguin led the field; apart from the *Film Review*, it offered *New Biology* (from 1945), *Science News* (from 1946) and *Music Magazine* (from 1947). The first issue of the *Review* began with a policy statement: 'Its Editors, in discussing the project with their friends both inside and outside the film world, have found everywhere a common desire for the existence of a progressive review which recognises the importance of the cinema in modern society.' Here is a clear indication of the publication's guiding spirit. Instead of the exuberance of post-undergraduate youth which buoyed up *Sequence*, the *Review* was dominated by the earnest enthusiasms of the evangelists and educationalists—the kind of people who had worked in the war with Civil Defence groups, the Army Bureau of Current Affairs or similar organisations, helping to stimulate discussion about every aspect of 'modern society' which would emerge at the end of the fighting.

At one level the *Review* was a simple forum for discussion and a disseminator of information, a commodity which achieved unusual popularity during the 1940s. The public had been bombarded with instructions and warnings during the war; the actual effect of the propaganda leaflets, broadcasts, posters

and films is now difficult to estimate, but it seems certain that people became more and more curious to learn facts and explanations about the world around them. The BBC's Brains Trust programme achieved vast success because of this need, and offered a panel of contrasting personalities to deal with listeners' enquiries about everything from Dunne's time theory, the definition of happiness to (most famously) the way flies land on ceilings. Through his appearances, Professor C. E. M. Joad, head of the philosophy and psychology department at Birkbeck College, became a prima donna of the airwaves, and even lent his distinctive name to one of the Ministry of Food's special economy dishes, dubiously named Joad-in-the-Hole.*

The *Review* kept its end up by printing reports from 'the world's studios' and H. H. Wollenberg's indigestible lists of statistics on various topics, which informed readers about the seating capacity of theatres in Puerto Rico and the amount of processed film imported into India in 1944/45. The magazine also offered its own version of the Brains Trust with the feature 'Your Questions Answered'. Readers could write in with their queries and have them answered by an expert in the next issue. Questions treated included the relative merits of black and white and colour, and the claims of documentary over fantasy: 'Which,' an unidentified reader asked, 'is the most desirable, and which is the more likely to predominate?' Pat Jackson attempted to answer this poser in the third issue. He naturally plumped for documentary, giving 'this wretched word' a wide definition and seeing in it a fulfilment of the cinema's 'greatest task'—'the destruction of prejudice and misunderstanding between the peoples of the earth.'

But there was a higher purpose than the mere dissemination of facts, a purpose hinted at in Pat Jackson's definition of cinema's 'greatest task'. The chief propelling force

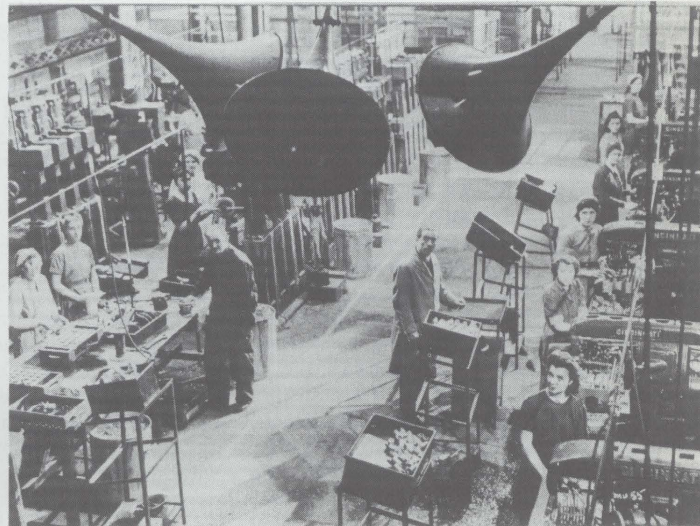
* The Brains Trust also took to the cinema screen: Strand Films photographed three special half-hour sessions in 1942 and 1943 at Elstree, after which Joad apparently had 'one or two offers from film producers' (Howard Thomas in *Britain's Brains Trust*). The first was made in a studio adjoining Lucan and McShane, busy with *Old Mother Riley Detective*. On release it received a fair response, though Thomas notes that 'it had a rough time in the Mile End Road, in Fulham, at the Elephant and Castle.'

behind the *Review* was a brand of idealism which has now almost faded out of sight in film culture. Cinema, it was believed, had the power not only to provide art and entertainment; it could also buttress civilisation and democracy after the knocks these concepts had received at the hands of Hitler and his allies. It was for this large but simple reason that the arts had been given Government support during the war after years of neglect (galleries and museums had received mostly parsimonious funds, but the performing arts were left to stand or fall on their own). This was why Myra Hess and other artists played in the National Gallery lunchtime concerts, used as part of Humphrey Jennings' collage of sounds in *Listen to Britain*. This was why the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA, later developed in 1946 into the Arts Council) and the Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) sent orchestras, chamber groups, touring players, art exhibitions and gramophone records round factories, hostels, air-raid shelters, churches, canteens, service bases. 'The Best for the Most', was how CEMA often described its policy, and it was hoped that the most would continue to get, and appreciate, the best when the emergency wartime conditions were over.

With such utopian feelings in the air, the cinema critics' vocabulary became inflated in a way never possible since. One could drop into a sentence phrases like 'renewed faith' and 'the intellectual future of mankind' without sounding excessively pretentious. For it seemed clear that the cinema, like the world, was poised at a portentous historical moment; the free world had been rescued from perdition and values had to be made secure. 'Never since the Renaissance,' said Roger Manvell in a typically large statement, 'has the world been so full of themes which the cinema . . . could use.' Cinema, it was noted repeatedly in the *Review*, was the universal language, which could bring all nations into greater communion with each other; great hopes were placed in the cultural wing of the United Nations, UNESCO, and its film activities.

If such idealism is rare now, it is equally rare to find a committed supporter of another of the *Review's* main beliefs (though it was held with less and less vigour as the issues went by)—that the British cinema had finally

Left: National Gallery concert audience in Humphrey Jennings' 'A Diary for Timothy'. Right: Launder and Gilliat's 'Millions Like Us'



reached artistic maturity and was strong enough to make a positive impression in the world market. Parallel with this fervent faith in the national product was what now seems an extraordinarily strong denunciation of the 'enemy' product from Hollywood. American films, Richard Winnington said, had 'a blatant and monotonous insincerity'; he computed that seventy per cent of the country's output was 'geared to the lower tastes of a less matured and less experienced people.' As Penelope Houston pointed out in the Spring issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, this attitude was partly derived from basic resentments felt about American soldiers in Britain during the war. And just as the war had exacerbated this dislike of the Yank, so the war—and the experience of fighting it on home ground—had supposedly given the British people and their films this extra maturity and experience. It was felt that the film industry had abandoned its customary reliance on second-hand subject-matter derived from novels and the stage and that the direct confrontation with wartime experience (in films like *Millions Like Us*, *The Way Ahead*, *In Which We Serve*, as well as the war documentaries) had given the films a new moral force. People of course packed the cinemas, and critics gladly noted any increase in their discrimination and sophistication. *Brief Encounter* was felt to be a case in point: 'It represents a confidence so utterly frank that few people will be simple enough to accept it as true,' wrote C. A. Lejeune, expecting Lean and Coward's piercing treatment of suburban infidelity to fall on its face at the box-office. Yet it achieved reasonable success, and came to be a talisman in the *Review* for the new sophisticated audience and the mature British cinema, being variously praised as 'blessedly adult, truthful and contemporary' (E. Arnot Robertson) and an example of 'individualistic film style' (H. H. Wollenberg); David Lean himself wrote an article about it.

Critics confidently expected that more blessedly adult, truthful and contemporary British films would follow after the war. Appraising David Lean's subsequent film *Great Expectations* in one of his critical surveys, Richard Winnington wrote that Cineguild 'have made the first great challenge to the world on behalf of Britain. They have made the big attack.' But by 1948, the issues of the *Review* were already resounding with sad cries that the expectations weren't being fulfilled. Far from making the big attack, British films were in fact retreating to the bad old days of the 30s. Studios were relying again on popular novels or the West End theatre for source material; there was a lack of sparkle among the actors ('Most of our younger stars can only smile or look startled,' said Manvell). In general film-makers turned about face away from the war and its problems, full tilt into what was regarded as unhealthy, unprogressive escapism. Films like Korda's *An Ideal Husband* and *Bonnie Prince Charlie* were roundly trounced for their foolishness, their lavish expenditure on matters of little importance. A. L. Vargas, writing of the former, even went so far as to say that 'one could hardly call it a film'; but by this time there were so many items that the earnest idealists of the *Review* would hardly call films—reel upon reel of ludicrous tosh emerged in the late 40s, particularly in 1947 and 1948: *The Upright Glass*, *Jassy*, *While I*



'Morbid burrowings . . . ' Gainsborough's 'Jassy'; Richard Attenborough in the Boultings' 'Brighton Rock'

Live, *Blanche Fury*, *The Three Weird Sisters*. Such films were repeatedly inhabited by a select range of dramatic types—doctors, lawyers, psychiatrists, concert pianists and violinists, gypsies, identical twins, escapees from prisons and remand homes. Most of these were variously afflicted with amnesia, blindness, partial paralysis or insensate jealousy.

Sometimes the adventures of these tortured characters were set back in period. But contemporary melodramas, Britain's brand of *film noir*, were met in fact with the most disdainful frowns of all from the critical establishment: films like *Brighton Rock*, *They Made Me a Fugitive*, *It Always Rains on Sunday* and others featuring spivs and petty gangsters were heartily condemned for the feeling they gave of moral disillusionment (some even drew parallels with the German cinema of the 20s). Instead, writers turned to foreign cinema for exemplary instances of morally bracing screen material fashioned from the contemporary scene: Italy had its neo-realists, while even America was praised for responding intelligently in films like *Boomerang* and *The Best Years of Our Lives*. This moral primness was only the negative side of the evangelists' idealism: the spiv films were perhaps received with such fury because the types they depicted were so clearly a product of the unsettled times, when petty lawbreakers had sympathetic support from a tired public. For it wasn't only the British cinema which was losing its idealism and enthusiasm; people began to regard the Labour Government's schemes with dwindling interest. They were tired of the reams of red tape thrown round all the machinery for social reform, eager for some diversion from the daily grind of queuing for dull food and then eating it, shivering through fuel crises, and putting up with other assorted hardships without the war to provide the sense of danger and necessity.

Criticism of the British film's 'morbidity'

'burrowings' (the phrase is from Arthur Vesselo, writing in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Autumn 1947) strikes a particularly odd note now, when film-makers have burrowed far lower and far more morbidly than anyone could have conceived at the time. It is also deeply ironic, for the critics' extreme rectitude stopped these stout champions of the British cinema from fully appreciating much of the best British cinema ever made. From the perspective of the 70s, films entered the doldrums in the early 50s, not the late 40s. In the 50s the notion of a British film conjures up a narrow range of unappealing genres—ingratiating whimsies set in regional backwaters, dull naval dramas, even duller thrillers with visiting American actors involved in country house crimes. But in the 40s, the British film was buoyant, audacious and surprising: even the maligned Gainsborough tosh was made with a technical excellence that goes a long way to compensate for any script inanities. In many cases the critics and the films were going in opposite directions: while the former sanctimoniously dug their heels in, the latter struck out in subject-matter and style, began to recognise the part that sex and violence play in urban life, began to delve underneath the characteristic British restraint. (The mood disappeared in the early 50s but surfaced again in Hammer horrors—at which point critics' reactions were just as before.) But for these valiant Knights of the British Film, not even technical virtues could be praised without qualification. Writing of Cavalcanti's *They Made Me a Fugitive* ('a tale of sordidness, corruption and violence almost unrelieved'), Arthur Vesselo noted sadly that 'as for technique, the film is horrifyingly well made.' Roger Manvell, in his turn, complained in the January 1948 *Review* about 'the sickeningly over-played fights with their resounding soundtracks' which seemed impossible to escape from—'the paranoiac character lurks even in the holiday camp,' he said, no doubt thinking of *Holiday Camp*. Now, however, it is rather the critics who seem the paranoiac characters.

The *Review* closed its doors at a time of great economic uncertainty in the film world. The editorial for May 1949 noted that sources of City finance were ebbing and that many studios were closed. In fact Charles Oakley, in his book *Where We Came In: Seventy Years of the British Film Industry*, nicknames 1949 'the year when everything went wrong'. Box-office receipts were already beginning their long drift downwards; the Rank Organisation was feeling the pinch after overreaching itself on an expanded production programme and sold its Shepherd's Bush studio to the new rival television.

Why did everything go wrong and the idealism fade away? It's an impossible question to answer adequately in a short space: so many factors played their part and the economic history of the film industry at this period still requires much scholarly unravelling before the full picture can be painted. But it needs no hardened cynic to realise that the hopes were unfulfilled partly because they had been pitched too high at the beginning. It was a matter of national pride and morale to salute British product during the war, but afterwards the new maturity of the country's cinema became a cliché, unthinkingly accepted by too many writers. Lindsay Anderson rightly gave the

semi-myth a brisk knocking in his *Sequence* article 'Angles of Approach' (printed in the second issue, dated Winter 1947), and based his attack on G. W. Stonier's recent *Vogue* piece titled with typical heady optimism 'The Coming Heyday of British Films'. 'Has Mr. Stonier ever analysed the plot of *The Way to the Stars*? [one of the films which for Stonier foreshadowed the heyday]. If he does, he will find it the epitome of all the popular West End comedy-drama successes of the last ten years—young lovers, comic background characters, misunderstandings, happy ending and all. Certainly the RAF background is well observed and realistically done; but the story that unrolls before it contains all the ingredients of a romance by Berta Ruck or Ethel M. Dell, and is as expertly contrived.'

One could point to other celebrated films of the 40s where the lively manner of telling the story clashed with the actual story: take *Waterloo Road*, where the film is sustained not by the triangular squabble between the AWOL soldier (John Mills), his girl (Joy Shelton) and the intruding spiv (Stewart Granger), but by the glimpses into the habits and hobbies of the incidental characters. Even the *Review* noted in time that complacency and smugness had descended on film criticism: 'Our critics have become too much like mothers who cannot see the faults of their own children,' said a fatherly Manvell in the fifth issue (January 1948).

But a greater factor in the failure to sustain the wartime impetus was the simple uncertainty about what kind of films to make. The public was itchy, its moods difficult to determine, and to many film-makers a return to outright escapism obviously seemed the most profitable solution. Few feature films endeavoured to maintain the public's supposed interest either in information and debate or in the way society was heading: there was no post-war equivalent to Ealing's 1944 *They Came to a City*, based on Priestley's play, with its plethora of characters experiencing a utopian society in the bowels of a hill (firmly kept out of camera

range) and talking about their reactions. The problem arose particularly sharply in the documentary field, which had comparatively little attention from the *Review*, though it received plenty of coverage elsewhere (in *Documentary News Letter*, for instance), and Grierson was always on hand to write an article defending it against undue attack.

The majority of documentaries made during the war were geared to the short-term aims of propaganda. They told the public how to construct emergency cooking stoves and handle fire extinguishers, persuaded them to bath in five inches of water, or described and extolled the various fighting forces and campaigns. Some films, however, had looked beyond the immediate horizon and, like the Civil Defence and ABCA discussion groups, tried to interest the audience in the kind of society to be constructed in peacetime—a society which would repair the deficiencies made glaringly apparent when the nation had to marshal its resources for battle. Housing particularly came in for attention: Sheffield's housing schemes were the subject of *New Towns for Old* (1942), and the London County Council proposals were given treatment in *The Proud City* (1944). On average the films were more notable for their good intentions than anything else. *The Proud City* in particular provides a most unconvincing view of the way things ought to be, with mackintoshed men clambering over blitzed houses extending a tape measure, and two architects (one with monocle and bow tie) showing us their plans for sweeping away London's slums and dead spaces without giving any indication of the kind of buildings to be substituted. Only Paul Rotha's productions (*World of Plenty*, *Land of Promise*) carried the makers' commitment through to the screen, and were stylistically bold and varied enough to command audiences' attention. Yet, whatever their failings, such films were considered noteworthy enough to be given art-house showings in London: *The Proud City* supported *The Oxbow Incident* at the Academy, while *Land of Promise*, more

incongruously, appeared at the Academy alongside a Fernandel comedy, *Fric-Frac*.

When the time came for the utopian dream to be made reality, however, documentary faltered. *Documentary News Letter* in its April/May 1948 issue printed an editorial firmly charging the Government's information services with dereliction of duty: the public wasn't being given enough facts and explanations about the present problems. One reason behind the confusion was organisational changes at the Central Office of Information, which succeeded the wartime Ministry of Information and went about its business in a different manner; instead of initiating its own films, which would reflect the various national policies, the Office became merely a servicing body handing out contracts and Treasury money to the documentary units, and handing out most of them to the Government's own Crown Film Unit. There was less room to manoeuvre, less understanding between sponsor and filmmaker, too much bureaucracy.

Some documentary makers also clearly felt ideologically stranded in the post-war period. In *A Diary for Timothy*, for instance, Humphrey Jennings had presented a complex portrait of British society. The baby Timothy was presented as 'one of the lucky ones', born in a nursing home near Oxford, given a choral baptism; but the film still included a firm critique of the country's social ills. 'It's pretty shocking, isn't it, that this sort of thing should happen every day, though we've been cutting coal for five hundred years,' says Michael Redgrave's narrator (reading E. M. Forster's text) as Goronwy the miner suffers an accident at work. At the end Timothy is handed a final question, as the camera catches him in close-up sucking a finger in his crib: 'Are you going to have greed for money or power ousting decency from the world as they have in the past, or are you going to make the world a different place—you and the other babies?' The baby, obviously, couldn't answer, and Jennings' own answer in his subsequent films is extremely uncertain.

Brave new world on the South Bank. The Festival of Britain's Telekinema, later the National Film Theatre





Robert Donat in the lugubrious last scene of *'The Magic Box'*

The Cumberland Story—a forty minute film made in 1947, about the troublesome expansion of a Cumberland mine involving new equipment and the reopening of an abandoned seam under the sea—marks his boldest attempt at showing the reconstructed society in action, but it is clear how uneasy he is doing it. In place of the allusive, collage style which sustained him during the war, Jennings shoots lengthy scenes with his chosen cast of real people—the mine's general manager James Nimmo and his colleagues, the Trade Union representative Tom Stephenson and the mine workers themselves. They are seen laboriously talking over their problems and laboriously reaching their decisions—demonstrating the democratic process at work. 'No one will look forward with me!' James Nimmo says plaintively. But his confidence isn't mirrored by the film itself, and the past obviously haunts Jennings as it does his miners, mindful of the appalling conditions in the Depression and the fateful flooding when the seam was first opened in the nineteenth century.

Jennings tried to look forward again in *The Dim Little Island*, made in 1949. This highly peculiar ten minute film offers its own kind of Brains Trust, with four varied experts (cartoonist Osbert Lancaster, naturalist James Fisher, industrialist John Ormston and composer Vaughan Williams) voicing their opinions on the future of Britain, the dim little island of the title. The most fervent optimist of the four is Vaughan Williams, whose music had great appeal to Jennings. He mentions the national upheaval of the war years as a cause of the current musical renaissance: isn't this the reason, he says, why 'those who had never taken music seriously before began to crowd our concert halls from Kensington to Harrogate to hear symphony concerts' (audiences, in fact, crowded everything but concert halls, which were in scandalously short supply). But the other speakers are more cautious. John Ormston, from Vickers Armstrong, supports Jennings' own belief that the Industrial Revolution was a good thing, though bad things had

developed out of it, with the ordinary man becoming separated from the worlds of science and technology. Osbert Lancaster takes cold comfort in the British delight in eccentricity: 'We have always, thank heaven, remained deaf to appeals to reason.' But there is no central discussion, no conclusion, and Jennings again seems unable to shake off the past with its assorted glories and dangers. The most urgent moments visually are the shots taken from *Fires Were Started* which accompany Vaughan Williams' comments on the wartime upheavals; the shots of leafy Britain in peace-time (which accompany James Fisher) seem merely water off a camera's back.

The Dim Little Island, peripheral though it is to the body of British documentary, does act as a stepping stone towards the 1951 Festival of Britain, which rounded off the immediate post-war period (and Labour's term in office) with a new flourish of idealism and cultural enthusiasm. Logically, the Festival should have come five or six years earlier, when its 'tonic to the nation' (the phrase of its instigator Gerald Barry) would have had better medicinal value. Practicalities, however, would have made the event difficult. Practicalities made it difficult in any case: after the 1949 devaluation one million pounds was lopped off the Festival budget (the estimated total was twelve millions, with two millions worth of revenue), and the appalling wet weather in the spring of 1951 turned the Festival Pleasure Gardens at Battersea into a mud bath. The Festival tried to regain the national identity of Britain which people had felt during the war: in the South Bank Exhibition and various local events throughout the country the nation's achievements and the goals for the future were to be displayed. The ideal notions about influencing civilisation filled the air again. On the evening before the bonanza opened, Herbert Morrison, the Government minister responsible for the enterprise, declared that 'this great demonstration of the British way of life could be a potent weapon in the

struggle of ideas between democracy and totalitarianism.'

Films naturally had their part to play in the temporary creation of a brave new world. Cinema activities came under the aegis of the British Film Institute, and J. D. Ralph, a former production manager at the National Film Board of Canada, came over specially to organise them. But the ills of the British film industry as a whole seemed to dog the project, for as the long months of planning passed by, far more films were abandoned than ever came to fruition. The main Festival Office went ahead with *Family Portrait*, commissioned from Wessex Films and Humphrey Jennings, but other items dropped out. Twelve documentaries to be sponsored by the BFI also fell by the wayside, though some money was restored for the production of experimental films—which resulted in a handful of 3-D exercises and the *Painter and Poet* series (where artists as varied as Mervyn Peake, Ronald Searle and Henry Moore provided images to accompany English poems). A Festival season of the best British films (fifty in number, tentatively selected) was going to be held at London's New Gallery Cinema, but on 30 April 1951, four days before the Festival proper was officially opened, the Government refused to exempt the BFI from paying Entertainment Tax on the proceeds, which made the whole project financially impossible.

Feature films were never part of the BFI's province, but these also came and went with the wind. Anatole de Grunwald announced his intention of making a film about Britain's greatest artistic treasure, William Shakespeare. The script was to be based on Clemence Dane's 1921 play *Will Shakespeare*; the lead would be taken by Richard Todd, with Edith Evans probably taking care of Queen Elizabeth. Richard Todd was obviously considered the Festival actor: he was also to star in another celebratory offering, an adaptation of Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. Frank Launder was going to prepare a musical for Korda, based on the 1851 Great Exhibition. But in the end only one feature emerged bearing the Festival seal, *The Magic Box*, a biography of cinema pioneer William Friese-Greene, made as a co-operative venture by the whole industry and directed by John Boulting.

It was not a success. Trouble began as soon as the film's production was announced at the end of June 1950 (notably late in the day—the film only emerged in September 1951, shortly before the main Festival attractions closed). The press release said: 'The little-known fact that the inventor of the motion picture was a Bristol-born Englishman makes the project peculiarly appropriate to next year's Festival of Britain.' Newspapers naturally picked up the hint, only to be met with letters and articles pointing out that Friese-Greene was only one of many working at the same time, photographing objects, people and scenes on celluloid film rather than glass plates. The film script as finally written (by Eric Ambler) pointed this out too, but the debate still continued. As a hero for a film contributing to national celebrations, Friese-Greene was also miscast in a typically British way, for his life follows a downward spiral into bankruptcy, disappointment and neglect—a sadly prophetic fate for any pioneer of the British film industry. The key

to the film and its attitude may be found in Fox-Talbot's words about the fate of all inventors: 'If he is true to himself he will not be too unhappy or embittered even in failure, and will still speak for what is good.' The moral virtues of failing: only the British could celebrate this with such dogged sincerity. And only Robert Donat, the winsome goodness of Mr. Chips still clinging to him like leeches, could turn what was planned as an impetuous rascal into a slightly erratic saint.

At the end the film pays its dues to Festival themes and looks to the future. Friese-Greene, on his last legs, addresses the industry bosses on the failure of the cinema to live up to its enormous potential: 'This universal language that could say great things, oh dear, it so often babbles and drivels so foolishly, doesn't it, I mean, that in time the world will tire of it. . . . You know, it's only in the nursery that children fight and destroy the things in their hands. . . . You must not destroy it. I ask you to work together—there's so much to hope for, so much, isn't there?' He then collapses, dies, and his pockets reveal one and tenpence in coins: 'Just the price of a seat at the pictures,' says a press man.

The Magic Box was not alone in Festival cinema in looking towards the future with the utmost timidity. The Petroleum Film Bureau sponsored the documentary *Forward a Century* (produced by Stuart Legg, directed by J. B. Napier Bell), which spent the most rewarding part of its time looking backward a century to the 1851 Exhibition, when the Crystal Palace was crammed with scientific and industrial products of Victorian confidence. Jennings' *Family Portrait* (his last film) mirrored this obsession with the immediate achievements of the Industrial Revolution. In essence this official attempt to present the Festival 'theme' cinematically is a revised and extended version of *The Dim Little Island*, better constructed and argued, more optimistic, but still made with a sad lack of passion which offsets the commentary's propaganda for the brave new Britain. 'This is the new thing!' says narrator Michael Goodliffe, accompanying shots of a jet-propelled aeroplane. But it's clear that Jennings far prefers engravings of early locomotives and public statuary to the 'new things' of 1951; the film's concluding words about Britain's international horizons particularly fail to convince.

Other parts of Festival cinema looked at the future with more vigour. The programmes at the South Bank's Telekinema were meant to 'point the way in which the cinema of the future may develop' (the words of the Exhibition catalogue), and audiences totalling 469,200 paid two shillings to see a selection of 3-D films, documentaries and television footage. Eventually the documentaries dropped out of the selection; to meet the demand the number of daily shows was increased, the length shortened, and only the novelties remained—except, it seems, on Tuesdays, when fewer people went to the Exhibition and the documentaries crept back. As a foretaste of the future, the 3-D films were misleading, for the craze faded away after a few years and the samples made for the Festival now seem timid in the extreme—some footling exercises from Norman McLaren (*Now Is The Time, Around Is Around*), *Royal River* (presenting as pretty a picture of the Thames as the dreadful weather

would allow) and *Eye on the Ball* (3-D badminton, snooker and other sports). With the other attraction of the Telekinema, television, the Festival's crystal ball was exactly right: this was the rival which was to make the film industry's problems worse than ever and to make the kind of hopes held by the *Review* and other journals in the 1940s totally redundant. Telekinema audiences saw televised scenes happening elsewhere on the South Bank, transmitted directly by cable; interviews were conducted for the purpose in the foyer to the Telekinema itself.

Once the Festival was over and the brave new world dismantled, what remained? The sixth annual report of the Arts Council, which had commissioned a whole range of murals, paintings, operas and ballets for the occasion, was full of pious hopes: 'The Festival of Britain as a whole was largely based on the proposition that the artist plays an important part in the life of the country, and it is to be hoped that the increased attention evoked by the arts during 1951 will not be allowed to diminish.' Some positive advances were certainly made. For all the collapsing projects of Festival cinema, enough good will and interest was generated to turn the Telekinema into the National Film Theatre, which opened in October 1952 for regular showings under the auspices of the BFI. British design and architecture received a tremendous boost from the examples shown on the South Bank. A Barbara Hepworth sculpture and two murals were rushed to decorate Harlow. On the other hand, many other items of art were destroyed or kept out of public view; several operas commissioned by the Arts Council have remained unstaged in Britain to this day (Berthold Goldschmidt's *Beatrice Cenci*, Alan Bush's *Wat Tyler*). And even the Arts Council's glowing report couldn't keep out a rueful feeling that for all the high hopes nothing had basically changed in the country's cultural climate: 'Many provincial museums and galleries were cleaned and

painted, some were refurbished, but there was little sign of any resolute decision to remove the trash that has accumulated over the years in so many of them.'

As the 50s continued on their way, the place of cinema in the nation's culture dwindled further. In 1953 Britain received another, more traditional, boost to its ego with the Coronation. Castleton Knight made a stodgy film record, *A Queen is Crowned*, with Olivier declaiming a narration by Christopher Fry which topped anything the Festival had produced in the way of purple rhetoric. But the largest public for the event (at 20,400,000 people, estimated at half the nation) watched it on their television sets, many of which had been newly acquired for the occasion. They were not to get rid of them.

Another film soon emerged to relate *The Conquest of Everest*: this did indeed hold hold audiences communally spellbound in cinemas, for here was an event which no BBC outside broadcast team could satisfactorily cover. But after that the nation's life ebbed and flowed (mostly the former) without any patriotic or moral support from the big screen. By the time of the 1977 Silver Jubilee celebrations—the only time since the early 50s when the population was asked to join hands and pat each other festively on the back—there was a tiny flurry of commissions and special exhibitions in the other arts, but no one really looked to the cinema to mark the occasion at all. A film did emerge, though: *25 Years*, presented by the London Celebrations Committee, which went the rounds of EMI cinemas, offering patrons a jumble of royal handshakes, Parliament openings, independence celebrations, frolickings with corgis and an investiture. But with its extreme lack of ambition and imagination, and its superficial brand of patriotism, this was yet another film which the writers of the *Penguin Film Review*—their sights set even higher than Everest—would hardly call a film at all. ■

'Land of Promise'



PERELMAN in Cloudsville

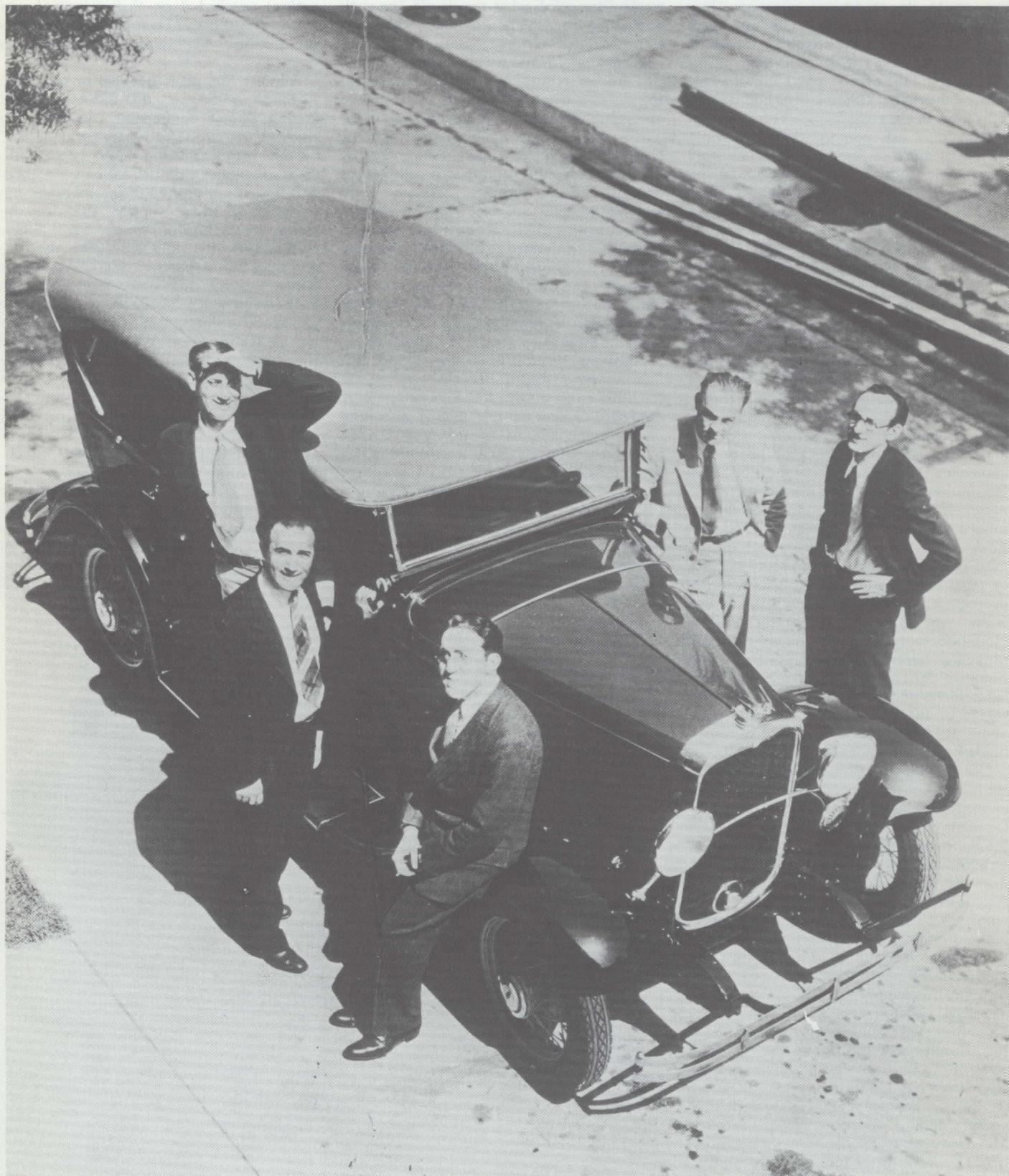
Mel Calman

Groucho Marx, Solly Violinsky, S. J. Perelman, John Stone, Arthur Sheekman in 1930, during the filming of 'Monkey Business'.
Right: Perelman in 1978



Fate somehow brought S. J. Perelman and the Marx Brothers together: a marriage of vaudeville and literary wit that resulted in two classics of movie humour, *Monkey Business* and *Horse Feathers*.

I managed to corner Mr. Perelman recently in a remote part of Ireland, where he was recovering from the rigours of promoting the English publication of *Eastward Ha* and the reissue of *The Most of S.J.P.*



PERELMAN: I first went out to Hollywood in December 1930, as I recall, soon after Groucho had hired Will Johnstone and me to work on *Monkey Business*. It began when I went to a performance of *Animal Crackers* on Broadway, and I was so entranced that I went to see them after the show. Groucho explained to me that the group was interested in doing some radio. The odd thing is that Johnstone was then a working newspaper cartoonist. I myself had worked for five years, both drawing and writing for *Judge* and the old *Life* magazine. We were both essentially comic artists.

Johnstone had worked for the Marx Brothers before, on a vaudeville sketch. Johnstone and I got into a huddle in a room for three days and the only idea we came up with was the notion of the four Marxists as stowaways on a transatlantic liner—each one in his own barrel. Having thought of this, our inspiration completely gave out. On the third day the Marx Brothers rang up and asked us to lunch. We put forward this idea and to our complete stupefaction Groucho turned to Chico and said, 'This isn't a radio sketch, boys—this is our next picture.' And before we had recovered our breath they took us by the hand and led us to the Paramount Building and introduced us to Jesse Lasky. We were both signed to six week contracts at 500 dollars a week. For us this was big money.

The Marx Brothers departed to Europe to appear at the London Palladium and we started work on the screenplay. Our supervisor was a man called Herman Mankiewicz (author with Welles of the screenplay of *Citizen Kane*). He was a Teutonic, overbearing broth of a man who was famous for his cutting wit. An interesting thing about the word 'supervisor'. The men who dominated movies had all been either pack peddlers or junk dealers. Sam Goldwyn had been a glove-maker. Mayer was a junk dealer. And the term 'supervisor' was a factory term.

Johnstone and I sat down and wrote what we thought was a screenplay. Neither one of us was experienced in this form; but we had picked up a lot of very professional terms—dollies, iris out and so forth—and we thought it necessary to cram all this nonsense into the script. There was a thing known as the Vorkapich shot. This was invented by a man named Vorkapich, who was a special effects man at Paramount. It was a fast close-up (like a zoom) to the face. Well, we Vorkapiched all over the place. We thought in our innocence that all these instructions would act as a guide to the director. We wrote about 125 pages in this fashion.

(The Marx Brothers had a disastrous season in London and returned to Hollywood. They summoned Perelman and Johnstone to read the script to them.)

There were the three married Marxes and their wives. They had also picked up some dogs—huge creatures. And their father . . . and their dentist, their lawyers, and their accountants. And Herman Mankiewicz and his wife, and his brother. There were 29 people and three dogs in that room. I began to read the script and I read all the instructions as well as the dialogue. When I got through there was a considerable silence. Chico turned to Groucho and said, 'Well, what do you think?' Groucho said audibly, 'Stinks'. Everybody rose and slowly left the room.

We went home and told our wives to start packing. The next morning the 'phone rang and Groucho said, 'Come over and let's get to work.' It took us about six months to write a new script and that became *Monkey Business*.

Did they add suggestions while you were writing it?

Largely speaking, Harpo and Chico were only interested in their specialities. Groucho was concerned in the whole picture . . . He considered me to be too literary. He often hurled this charge at me. For instance—in that picture Groucho and Thelma Todd were making love and I had written the scene so that suddenly Groucho was to jump up and say, 'Come Kapellmeister, let the violas throb, my regiment leaves at dawn.' And then he was to go into a parody of the famous scene from *The Merry Widow*. Groucho read this scene and said, 'The trouble is that the barber in Peru won't get it.' He meant Peru, Indiana. I disagreed violently with him, because I think that Groucho was a master of parody. What eventually happened was that this whole scene was cut out. But that one line is still in the picture. It always gives me a thrill to hear that line.

Didn't you work on another Marx Brothers film?

Yes. Eighteen months later they hired me to work on *Horse Feathers* in collaboration with Kalmar and Ruby. But the Marxes were boorish, they were ungrateful. It was a very uneasy combination. Harpo was the nicest brother.

In 1934 my wife (who was Nathanael West's sister) and I had written our first play, which was made into a picture. I went back to Hollywood whenever we were broke. Hollywood could absorb writers. There were five big studios. The studios owned the cinemas and the bill was changed twice a week, so that an enormous amount of product was needed. There were at one time 104 writers on the lot at Metro. All of us were on an assembly line, rewriting each other's pictures. After the first novelty, working there quickly became very boring. I began to see that it was a technique, that anyone of reasonable intelligence could pick up. What films were about then—and what, I think, films are still about—was the unexpected. Those people prospered who had a quick mind and the ability to arrange shallow, trivial situations that were unexpected. It is a medium in which a lot of shallow people became successful.

What did you think of Irving Thalberg? Was he impressive?

My wife and I worked on one picture for Thalberg and I never saw any sign of this greatness. He was able to buy talent. I can remember when eight of the most famous playwrights in America were in his anteroom, waiting to see him. It was my first intimation of what power means. In my mind, power is the ability to purchase people and make them wait for you.

Didn't you work on *Sweethearts*? That seems a rather unlikely film for you to have been involved in.

We were hired by Thalberg to work on this wretched thing called *Greenwich Village*, which was an almost indescribable pot-pourri of nonsense. Later on we were hired by Hunt

Stromberg to work on *Sweethearts*. . . There is always a courtship period between a producer and a writer, in which the producer asks the writer what he wants to work on. This is as formalised a ritual as a bullfight. If the writer is naive at all (and he usually is), he comes up with a suggestion. We suggested a play and related the plot to Stromberg. Stromberg countered by asking if we had heard of *Arms and the Man*. He wanted to combine *Arms and the Man* with *The Chocolate Soldier*.

By the way, he said—speaking of Victor Herbert, have you heard of *Sweethearts*? At this our eyes capsized in our heads because some of the sickliest music that has ever been written is that stuff. . . He then got hold of a record player and played some of this dreadful hogwash. That's what we're going to make, as though the idea had just appeared, like a Mazda bulb over his head. Well, we needed the work. We needed the money. So we numbly acceded. We figured we could dress it up. You always think . . . well . . . things are bad . . . but you have to eat. We stuffed a psychiatrist into it . . . all kinds of things. My wife was then heavily pregnant with our first child and she had begun to show . . . so we finally told Stromberg that she couldn't continue working on the picture. She retired from the scene and he hired Dorothy Parker and her husband, Alan Campbell.

Stromberg became intensely creative. He used to walk up and down, dictating voluminous notes about the characters. Dorothy Parker sat, knitting a long shapeless garment that eventually became about 14 feet long and two feet wide. It looked like a carpet for a staircase. She had those Winston Churchill glasses perched on the end of her nose and a look of . . . she was way off in some other country. Her husband was a beautiful looking man—a great conference man, always popping ideas. Every so often Stromberg would stop and say, 'Dorothy, what do you think of it so far?' And she'd look up over the top of her glasses and say, 'Oh, I do think it's marvellous, don't you?' Later on, they wrote *A Star is Born*—the one with Fredric March.

What was the average salary in Hollywood then?

The Screenwriters Guild made a study in 1935 and found that the average salary was 30 dollars a week. Because some writers were working for nothing—right up to Ben Hecht who was getting 5,000 dollars a week. But the average was probably somewhere between 500 and 1,750 dollars a week. Successful writers like the Hacketts (who wrote *The Thin Man* movie) were making around \$5,000 a week. All our salaries, by the way, were common gossip. It was that kind of society. The social life consisted of interminable dinner parties where nothing was talked about but film. Grosses, performances. It was like an industrial town where shoes are made . . . and where nothing but shoes is talked about.

Dorothy Parker referred to it as fairy money, which disappeared before you ever left the town. And it did—in a strange way. Those of us who came from the East went out there in a buccaneering spirit. We didn't care to live in those palaces . . . we just wanted to earn a quick dollar in order to get on with our own work. ■



Rossellini as teacher: 'Man's Struggle for Survival'

ROSSELLINI'S DIDACTIC CINEMA

Harry Lawton

The death of Roberto Rossellini in June 1977 compels us to an assessment of his whole career; but particular attention should focus on the last fifteen or more years devoted exclusively to informational cinema, to the reconstructions of great lives and historical epochs in films made for television. In spite of the variety of Rossellini's cinema, the driving force that binds his career together, animating all his films from *Rome, Open City* (1945) to the ill-conceived *Anno Uno* (1974), was the didactic impulse, the desire to inform.

Rossellini offered a lead in European cinema whenever the climate dictated a change. Decade by decade, as Europe moved from reconstruction to economic boom to psychological anomie, Rossellini was there to probe the crisis, refining his style in reflection of the post-war mood, providing examples for his contemporaries to follow. Although he appeared to begin his career anew in 1964 with the abandonment of the feature for the documentary (*L'Età di Ferro*), he was in fact moving along lines already well established, while anticipating a crisis in education at all levels and in the general diffusion of knowledge. The latter does not explain, but it does lie behind, the explosion of student anger in Paris in 1968 and in Italy a year later. As titular head of the government-run Centro Sperimentale, Rossellini had a special interest in ensuring that students under his wing should not be bored to death by their studies.

For convenience alone, we can divide his career into three parts. The War Trilogy, beginning with *Rome, Open City*, was born of neo-realism, out of the need to create an independent, populist and anti-fascist art for the post-war world. But already by *Stromboli*

(1949) Rossellini was moving on, away from the collective and social impulses of neo-realism, into the problems that were always more pressing to him: those of spiritual and religious direction. This concern for moral reconstruction after the physical rebuilding of

the aftermath is marked by *Francesco, Giullare di Dio* (1950), *Europe '51* (1951) and *Viaggio in Italia* (1953), but extends back to the fable *Il Miracolo* (1947), which includes two of the main contributors to *Rome, Open City*: Anna Magnani and Federico Fellini.

This second period of Rossellini's career demands a study in itself. For the moment we may regard it as a necessary passage towards the final evolution of his work in the 1960s, as a deepening of the didactic impulse which would lead to the jettisoning of the theatrical film. However, the following points can be briefly made. (1) Rossellini's concern for the spiritual crisis in the individual eases the way for parallel studies by Fellini and Antonioni in the same decade. (2) Whereas there is little room for alternatives to alienation in the films of the other two directors, Rossellini introduces us to the theme of public service (especially in *Francesco* and *Europe '51*). (3) The Franciscan spirit of service, incarnate in the figure of the Saint, reaches back to Don Pietro of *Open City* and forward to the secular and spiritual teachers of the later films: Augustine of Hippo, the disciples of *The Acts of the Apostles*, Socrates, Descartes, Leon Battista Alberti.

The teachers are naturally responsible for developing and spreading the new ideas in Rossellini's films, embodying in themselves the continuity of civilisation. The neo-realist and, as we may call it, the spiritual period in his work throw up one or two outstanding examples (Don Pietro, St. Francis); but in the final period the central figure of each film is almost invariably a teacher or exemplar, for whom teaching is an active commitment to the betterment of mankind. Not surprisingly, these figures share the views of the film-maker on questions of instruction and communication. Socrates, for example, insists on a language that dispenses with rhetoric and eloquence, and is devoted exclusively—as the life of man should be—to the pursuit of truth.

As Rossellini revitalises the idea through the image, his teachers translate their mission into action. When Don Pietro is shot, it is for his deeds, not his faith. What we are drawn to in *Francesco* is the urgency of the brothers, their energy, their dedication to useful action in the world of men. There is also the tragic side of the figure of the teacher, as a matter of historical fact rather than a result of Rossellini's personal vision. The pioneers in the history of ideas have been forced to do battle with ignorance and prejudice as a matter of course, and presumably the duality of Christ as teacher-martyr is never far from the director's awareness. Don Pietro is shot by the Nazis for resistance activities, but not before he makes the torturers of Manfredi recoil before his righteous anger. The simple brother Juniper is almost beheaded by the tyrant of Viterbo. Socrates is condemned. Even Pascal—not himself persecuted—suffers because of the persecution of the Jansenists among whom he found peace at Port-Royal.

Leon Battista Alberti alone is fortunate in finding a harmony between his interests and his time, and even his career is not without its tensions as he tries to strike a balance between his clerical duties within the Curia and his secular impulses, as he champions republican freedom and plurality in an age of despots. Nevertheless, in the case of the multi-faceted Alberti, we can invoke the

un-Rossellinian theme of coincidence and conjunction. Happy the times that yoked his talents to the enlightened leadership of Cosimo de' Medici. If the genius of the one needed the patronage of the other, the prince needed the artist to add lustre to the reign.

As these films reveal ways of dramatising ideas, so Rossellini draws our attention to teaching methods. Placing the figures of Alberti and Socrates side by side, you observe two fundamental stages in the evolution of human knowledge. The Greek emphasis is speculative, the Renaissance scientific. If Socrates uses only the word, Alberti has his *camera obscura*. Along with the distinction goes a connection. Renaissance writers were fond of referring to Socrates as an ideal citizen, a master of dialectic (the dialogue as a means of debating a major issue was a favourite Renaissance form, as Alberti's own *Book of the Family* testifies) and a universal man. Alberti is usually quoted as the prime example of the type in the Quattrocento. Finally, both Socrates and Alberti embody the quality that Rossellini most prizes as a sign of the civilised ideal: the cultivation of reason in the name of knowledge and social progress. It is this, leading directly to a clash with entrenched values, that links the personalities and their periods, through the theme of enlightened scepticism.



To talk of a 'break' with narrative cinema in the early 60s is deceiving. For, even as Rossellini decides no longer to be a teller of tales, he continues to deepen the lines of educational cinema already laid down since 1945. The difference now is that the didacticism is overt. The very indicative figure of the teacher is simply the clearest visual link between points in his career, but by no means unique. Rossellini's cinema is, to quote a useful remark by one of his acutest commentators, Pio Baldelli, 'anti-monumental'. Basically, this means that the director never set out to make an immortal work of art, a monument to his name. There is something disposable about his movies, each work being seen as serving a specific purpose at a specific time. Once a project is over, one moves swiftly on to the next. The emphasis on the utilitarian, the elimination of the star, the discarding of conventional plot, melodrama and spectacle: these were the marks of Rossellini's cinema for thirty years. The lives of Socrates, Augustine, Alberti and Pascal are not studies of personality or private drama. The central character in each is the embodiment of ideas in action.

The discarding of the narrative shell was based on firm convictions. On several occasions, in interviews and statements, Rossellini referred admiringly to the work of the American child psychologist Omar Moore. Beyond the primary impulses of fear and desire in the infant, Moore has deduced a third, of vital potency: curiosity, or the instinctive wish to learn and know. Justified by this scientific evidence, Rossellini based his whole output of the 60s and 70s on the human craving to be (intelligently) informed.

A major concern of his is a familiar worry: the uncontrollable accumulation of data in the sciences in the last twenty years, which has gone way beyond the layman's capacity to absorb it. The specialisation deriving from this has led to scientists themselves losing the

capacity to communicate with each other, let alone to the non-scientific world outside. This loss of a generic sharing of ideas which existed in simpler times induced Rossellini to seek out a cinematic language of dialogue and synthesis that boils down the fundamental ideas of social and scientific progress to the assimilable. We have not lost our capacity for curiosity. But most men have grown up on the assumption that the new ideas, and most of the old ones, are beyond their understanding. If our schools are failing to bridge this gap, Rossellini's didactic cinema is a concerted attempt to begin filling the void.

Hence the overall pattern of his work after *L'Età di Ferro*. The primary emphasis is on the history of science, with a preference for the history lesson over the contemporary issue. Faced with the velocity of the present scientific revolution in the related fields of nuclear physics, cybernetics, space exploration (dramatised for him as a result of his work at the Rice University Media Centre in Houston, Texas), Rossellini knew it was time to go back to the second scientific revolution of the age of Galileo and Descartes to take stock of the origins of those ideas and discoveries that began the march to the nuclear age. Much of his activity is therefore focused on 17th century France, where in science and statecraft one can sense the stirring of the modern world (*Descartes, Pascal, The Rise to Power of Louis XIV*). Against the speed of contemporary advance, Rossellini urges on us the need for a slow-down and a meditation on how things began. 'Have the courage to be slow,' he stresses in reference to his overall vision, and to the particularities of his expository style.

Missing from these films is the definition of the relationship between the scientist and the State, clearly a thorny contemporary issue. The relationship was from the beginning a dependent one, inhibiting the totally free spirit of enquiry. The modern State and its surrogate, the multinational corporation, are nowadays the major source of research funds; the State has taken the place of the private patron (such as the Duc de Roannez in *Pascal*). The tendency is implied but not

Continuing images of the teacher: Rossellini's Socrates and St. Francis



examined in *Louis XIV*, where doctors serve cardinals and kings, but not the ordinary citizen, and where the architect serves the ambition of the monarch. In Colbert's catalogue of jobs that will modernise France there will be a demand for the scientist, technologist, engineer; and they will be working for the state. Legitimate questions are raised here about a relationship that puts the researcher in a position of dependence, that puts pressure on him to please, or not to displease, the patron, about the selective issuing of information. Rossellini does not raise these questions. His 1964 film on the role of iron in human civilisation was financed by Finsider (Italy's metallurgical giant). The man who receives a direct subsidy to make films for the state-controlled TV network is going to take at best a neutral attitude towards the sponsor. Is not this what John Grierson once referred to as 'the degree of general sanction'?



The most fundamental enquiry any artist can embark on is the odyssey for adequate expression. Living in an age of billions of daily printed words, of a mass accumulation of filmed images, he will wonder about the consequent failure of communication on the personal level, and about the imparting of intelligent information to the public. Rossellini's preoccupation with a language of exposition that combines word and image and simplifies without distorting is precisely that of his central figures, including those of his pre-documentary period. A teacher like Socrates is dependent on words. A preacher like St. Francis depends on a special spiritual power within the words that motivates people to act. A theorist and builder like Alberti moves logically from theory to practice, from the word on the page to the visibly realised word of art and architecture.

The key figure here is Socrates, whose place in the history of knowledge is dependent on a radically new concept of language itself. Before Socrates, the human word, or *logos*, contented itself with the limited function of describing presumed stable relationships: between man and his gods, for example, or between man and nature. At this point the word has a quasi-ritualistic function; with Socrates comes its secularisation. He raises the very reasonable question whether the gods need man's sacrificial gifts. Socrates' method is the question, demanding of listener, student, adversary an absolute clarification of terminology and a questioning of a basic premise. The thesis that cannot stand up to logic, and later—in the age of Galileo—to the evidence of gathered data, must be replaced. So, with Socrates, language becomes enquiry and teaching, in theory, becomes an intellectual probe into the future, not the memorising of existing knowledge.

He establishes a principle which achieved full recognition in the Italian Renaissance, but which some would prefer to place in the 18th century: that of language as an activity. Here the conventional distinction between physical labour and the act of talking, normally regarded as mental activity, breaks down. The 18th century *philosophe* sees the words he speaks and writes as vehicles for the new ideas which, applied, help to shape the new society. The word is not relegated to pure theory. Serving as the blueprint for the new

social order, words come first just as surely as the architect's plans precede the building.

The link between architecture and language takes us on to the figure of Alberti in *The Age of the Medici*. Like Socrates, Alberti lived in an age breaking away from clerical hegemony over word and action. The Florentine follows the Athenian in linking the best in language with the virtues of the active life (*negotium*). Through Alberti, Rossellini reminds us of the Renaissance linguistic debate between the champions of the vernacular and the defenders of Latin (the language of the Church and academic conservatism). With his patron Cosimo listening in, Alberti argues for the use of Italian over Latin in literature, on the grounds that the language of daily use is more fit to conduct enquiries into the issues of the day. Dressed in clerical garb, he courteously opposes a cleric who has just defended Latin as the only appropriate vehicle for the expression of the loftiest thoughts. Not so, replies the apostle of the active life, quoting the example of Dante. Vernacular Italian is the language of direct address, of immediate observation. Its use is predicated on the emergence of a wider (though by no means popular) audience. As Alberti presses his views on the democratisation of culture, we realise that Rossellini has discovered an ally, cinema being the vernacular of our day that tries to restore to scholarship a lost vigour and curiosity. This conversation takes place out of doors, as the erudite company stroll through parkland. The exterior shot adds freshness and a sense of expansiveness to the ideas expressed. And yet one contradiction is not cleared up; for the major dialogues and discourses of the Renaissance—including Alberti's own treatise on architecture—were still written in Latin, and thus the talk on the need to broaden the appeal of literature remains largely theoretical. Still, the debate is initiated, and it is fascinating to discover in Alberti a precursor to Rossellini's view of language as an active conduit for knowledge.



To appreciate fully the shift from the more oblique discourse of narrative to the direct statement of didactic cinema, where facts must speak for themselves without the camouflage of drama or character, it is instructive to examine the openings of Rossellini's major documentaries. Immediately, the new language of exposition is clarified and established boldly and unselfconsciously, information is delivered with energetic simplicity and basic lessons are taught (which take us way beyond the immediate issues of a particular film, into the principles of the informational genre). We can sense the director's relief at having abandoned the conventions of narrative to allow himself the uninterrupted concentration on the historical fact itself. Without unnecessary preliminaries, we are plunged bluntly in *medias res*, into the midst of a crisis, witnesses to the birth of a new idea. What is demanded of us is an immediate intellectual focus and an active participation in the debate on screen.

Invariably, Rossellini begins at a point of crisis or transition. *The Age of the Medici* starts with the death of the patriarch, Giovanni, and the transfer of power to his sons. *The Rise to Power of Louis XIV* opens

with the oblique reference to the death of Mazarin. In *Pascal* we witness the transfer of Blaise's father to Rouen; and the toppling walls of Athens at the start of *Socrates* are a clear indication of a victory or a defeat (explanation as to whose and with what consequences is not long in coming).

Louis XIV is a special case in that it does not open on the main characters, within the corridors of power. It opens with the servants of the powerful, arranged in hierarchical order, with the context, in short, in which the power brokers operate. Doctors on horseback pass a group of workmen at the side of the road, with the castle of Vincennes in the background. The doctors may not notice the workers, but *they* notice the doctors. One of them remarks that the rich and powerful can always count on a doctor's visit, but a poor man can barely find a barber to bleed him. From the conversation we also learn that a woman's brother-in-law can count himself lucky to be employed in the royal cellars, emphasising the economic dependence (a kind of advanced feudalism) of populace on palace. This succinct opening statement carries a special weight, given the rarity of specifically democratic moments in Rossellini's documentaries. Louis' concern will be with the control of his aristocracy; and yet it is with the *menu peuple* in mind (as well as with their legitimate complaints) that he embarks on the reforms recommended by Colbert. Apart from that first sequence, the people are conspicuous by their absence in *La Prise de Pouvoir*. Does that tell us something about the course of the French monarchy from Louis' reign until 1789?

We should recognise that, despite Rossellini's correct dedication to the vulgarisation of ideas and the general spread of education, the vision of history in the documentaries is clearly paternalistic. While banking boomed in *The Age of the Medici*, the culture it sponsored was academic and erudite in taste, beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen (who in the film seems to view the panorama of history at a distance). *Socrates* expresses specific objections to the popular forms of democracy practised in Athens, which, he would assume, led directly to anarchy and injustice, with government in the hands of the inexperienced chosen by lot. Rarely do we follow the course of the rise of popular culture (or find a comment on its role); and never is an ordinary man or woman quizzed on their views on politics or art. From the rare appearance of the common people at the outset of *Louis XIV*, deductions can be drawn about the larger cultural patterns of Rossellini's documentaries and about the historical periods they seek to describe.

A less familiar film, *Augustine of Hippo*, provides in its opening moments a model of exposition and the compression of information in the shortest possible time. Word and image carefully complement each other, with the dialogue clarifying what is suggested in the imagery. Scene four of the film (a street in Hippo) shows us the flourishing images of commerce, a counterpoint to Augustine's episcopacy. Two bishops, Megalius and Alipius, to whom we have already been introduced, witness the scene. Their presence in Hippo is explained by the decision of the bishop Valerius to retire and hand over authority to a younger man. Traffic in the street is at a standstill. A cart is being

unloaded by blond slaves under the supervision of richly clothed black merchants. Two black women with shaven heads walk by. A minimum of shots encompass all this movement. An overall position of the camera is preferred, varied by gentle displacements to follow or emphasise movement or blocking. Thus a tracking shot accompanies a worried white merchant as he approaches the cart, which is laden with his goods. A black merchant walks towards him, and a medium two shot is established emphasising the men talking against the background of activity. From their conversation we learn that the narrow streets of Hippo require the transfer of imported goods from one sized cart to another (with an extra tariff!); that the women's shaven heads are a sign of mourning for the death of the Emperor Theodosius. This transfer of secular power (marked by the sacrifice of women only) precedes the imminent transfer of clerical power from Valerius to Augustine.

These examples illustrate Rossellini's basic didactic principle, that minimal means are to be used to communicate the maximum number of ideas. The greatest virtue is to be unobtrusive, since here is less distraction from a central theme. From the time of *Rome, Open City*, Rossellini consistently preferred the inclusive master shot (the '*plan-séquence*'), which shapes a sequence in a major, often static, take, over the conventional division of a scene into a series of detailed shots. The '*plan-séquence*' can be varied by unobtrusive dollies or tracks, by slow zoom-ins from panorama to close-up, or in the reverse direction which might transform monologue into dialogue, without the intervention of the cut. (Remember, it is not only what one character says but the perception or reception of the words that counts.)

The intimacy of certain scenes and close-ups is both a sign of the austerity of Rossellini's later manner and a consequence of his working for television. If a television budget demands simplicity, the smaller screen establishes a closer rapport between scene and spectator. This is in the interests of the film-maker who needs to focus closely on the central characters who are the purveyors of ideas, who may need to lecture without appearing to, and who will want to invite the individual viewer to participate in a debate. To lessen the distraction of spectacle and camera movement is to sharpen the focus on fact; and the seemingly static progress of these documentaries, largely conducted via conversations, is further illustration of Rossellini's 'courage to be slow'.

The arrest of Fouquet in *Louis XIV* is conducted entirely with a distant, high angle shot looking obliquely down into a courtyard. We hear no words exchanged. We are in Nantes, Fouquet's stronghold, where the monarch has deliberately come to test his strength and prove his will to rule. The king's envoy, D'Artagnan, approaches Fouquet as he leaves the building, presents the warrant and demands the prisoner's sword. There may be a split second's hesitation, but no resistance, and Fouquet is driven off in a carriage. His mistress, Mme du Plessis, remains alone, vivid red on grey-green stone, and slowly retreats to her litter: the visual isolation a complete statement in itself. The swiftness and boldness of the stroke is testament to the audacious but never rash



'The Rise to Power of Louis XIV'

quality of Louis' policies, to his understanding of the element of surprise. The high angle shot may be unusual in Rossellini's repertoire, but is chosen with prosaic logic; for it is the point of view of the king, both architect and director of this scene. What other viewpoint is possible in this context?

The brevity of this brilliant sequence, plus the singularity of that high angle, mark the film's dramatic climax. What follows is the consolidation of power, which has now been grasped. The following scene of Louis with his tailor is not devoted to an orgy of vanity, but to an exposition of the means of control and centralisation. It is in this scene that fashion and power are interwoven. For as Louis sets the tone of the new regime, to Colbert, who has replaced Fouquet, goes the responsibility for enthusiastic delivery of the blueprint for national reorganisation. The next scene amusingly discomforts a nobleman who returns to Court after a period of banishment, dressed in what looks like simple daily attire. Asked to explain his 'rags', he apologetically confesses that to live outside the monarch's orbit reduces a man to barbarism. Three scenes in short order thus establish the king's determination to rule and to quell a restive nobility; his choice of fashion as a means of control, obliging dependence on a central authority; finally, the workings of that policy, as witnessed by the return of a black sheep to the fold.

By *The Age of the Medici*, made some six years later, Rossellini's mastery of exposition and the visual clarification of concepts is complete. Here *mise en scène*, dramatic blocking and the dynamics of camerawork combine to reveal the dynamics of historical relationships. The central relationship in this film is not between prince and bureaucrat, but between artist and patron, the reciprocal contribution of patronage to art and art to the prestige of the state. Within the whole context of the film, it is important that the black-clad figure of Alberti, in Part II, returns to Florence slightly before Cosimo. It reflects Alberti's slightly greater freedom of

movement as an individual, and possibly Rossellini's own feelings about the humanist's greater prominence. On Cosimo's return to Florence from political exile, Alberti and his brother join an excited crowd as it moves towards the banker's town house. The camera marks this progress as a sign of general Florentine support for the new order, bringing with it the overthrow of the old oligarchs. As Cosimo greets his supporters and moves towards the Signoria, he is flanked from behind by the Alberti brothers. This triad—not overemphasised within the crowd, but marked none the less—summarises a new alliance of forces in Medici Florence. Banking, Trade and Art are carefully arranged, with the Banker/Ruler at the apex. A natural separation occurs as we see Alberti's eye suddenly diverted, and as the rest of the crowd moves forward past the camera, Leon Battista is picked up as he moves alone towards screen right to the studio of Donatello, announcing his preference for the fortune of art over affairs of state.

A second Trinity—this time representing three of the faces of humanism—appears in Part II of the film. This section catalogues the multiple aspects of Alberti's career as mathematician, architect, theorist and humanist educator. Mathematics—itself a language of harmony and synthesis and a bridge between science and art—links the opening sequences: that of Alberti measuring a child's head, that of his interpretation of Masaccio's Christ in Santa Maria Novella.

These ideas are given a fullness in the film's third sequence, which emphasises the Renaissance respect for synthesis, unity and mathematics and is based almost entirely on a three shot. The composition is as simple as taste dictates. The scene is a study, with each figure representing a branch of learning. To the left stands Toricelli, the mathematician, to the right Alberti, serving here largely as listener. Seated at a desk in the centre, as a mark of respect, is the theologian and mystic, Cardinal Niccolò Cusano. The group forms a triptych summarising the learning of the new

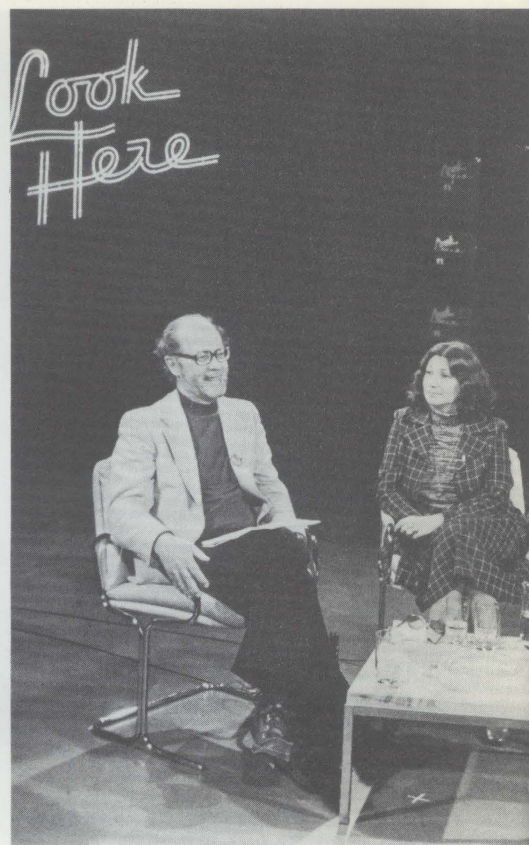
age. Toricelli unrolls a map and explains how he has been able to calculate the distance around the earth's circumference. Alberti is naturally impressed that mathematics is employed in the arts, in geography, in commerce and trade, and of course in his own areas of architecture and engineering. For this dialogue the main set-up is a two-shot, with Toricelli and Alberti huddled over the map. The emphasis is entirely anthropocentric, and it is up to Cusano to remind his visitors that their enthusiasm for man must not blind them to God's authorship of the whole. The camera moves from the group of three to a single shot of Cusano, with one cut away to Alberti meditating on his words. On the one hand, Rossellini reminds us of the secular-spiritual dialectic of the age; but equally Cusano is no medieval theologian. The platonists Ficino and Pico would follow him in emphasising one-ness and unity: the synthesis of schools of Christian thought and the reconciliation of sects and beliefs that were tearing Christendom apart at the time of Augustine. There is a strong sense here (the cut away quoted above) that Alberti, whose life now points in a different direction, is not quite convinced; but at the end the camera draws back, freezing all three men, silent and immobile, in the same frame, as a mark of their mutual respect.



Attention to detail of the sort Rossellini lavishes on his films will reveal just how much the camera can compress, synthesise and beautifully transmit information. We must emphasise that the director himself is a character in these last films: that of the curious autodidact, imbued with the spirit of enquiry. No expert, he possesses the innate instinct to know, the humility to be plain in his style, the total lack of self-consciousness in dealing directly with facts. He aims at being less the schoolteacher than a companion in the public quest for knowledge. He reveals the special role of television, and even the delicate question of government sponsorship in the dissemination of ideas. And he repeatedly proves his point that the pursuit of and struggle for ideas themselves can be exciting, that the greatest heroes are the intellectual pioneers. Talking to Philip Strick (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Spring 1976), he referred to a survey undertaken by RAI showing that only one per cent of the respondents had even heard of Blaise Pascal. After the screening of his film, the proportion had shot up to 45 per cent. Plus, he was amused to note, the sales of Pascal's books had risen dramatically. People will watch on TV what they will not go out to see: even a film on Pascal.

Rossellini's didactic cinema urges us to a debate on the issues raised. Since one of his themes is continuity in pushing knowledge forward, we should call for his example to be followed in Italy and elsewhere, at least in the filming of his unfinished projects. At the same time, the debate over his own views and the selective interpretation of history needs extending. Let this be a point of departure.

The British Film Institute has entered into negotiations to acquire a number of Rossellini's television films for distribution in this country, including Socrates, Blaise Pascal, The Age of the Medici and Descartes.



A television station has a number of channels through which the public can make contact. What is known as a duty officer sits at the end of a telephone and fields calls from the public, ranging from the enraged to those merely requiring information. Programmes also inspire letters: members of the public may write, for instance, to the Independent Broadcasting Authority, if they know what and where it is, with grievances, comments and—occasionally—praise. In the last resort, both the BBC and the IBA have bodies called Complaints Commissions, which solemnly judge whether individuals or organisations have been misrepresented or mistreated by the broadcasters, and which exercise fairly derisory powers.

Contrary to popular belief, the broadcasting organisations take these communications from the public quite seriously. All telephone calls taken by the duty officer are logged, and where a reply is appropriate it is thought very important that it should be made. Sometimes this merely takes the form of sending a signed photograph of a television star; often, the producer of a programme which has caused comment himself replies to the complainant.

Most replies, of course, defend the programme's position, and most of the people who receive them can't altogether be blamed for thinking that they are a shade anodyne. But the overall tone of the response to a programme series can sometimes affect the thinking that goes into later episodes. Melvyn Bragg, for instance, says that people who write to *The South Bank Show* complaining about all this culture being shoved down their throats don't get much notice taken of them; but people who write in more detail, giving the programme an idea of what kind of culture they would prefer to have shoved down their throats, sometimes produce ideas which get taken into the thinking of the programme team.

If the letters or phone calls about a programme tend to agree with each other (and aren't obviously posted from the same postbox) then some disquiet is experienced, especially if the topic has to do with sex or

violence. Twenty letters complaining about bad language in a programme is a shoal of protest at the IBA; a hundred—a total rarely achieved—would be an avalanche. There would be (indeed there have been) hurried meetings at the IBA, and encyclicals would be issued. A score of members of the Friends of the Earth complaining about the lack of a representative of the ecology lobby on the panel of a current affairs programme about economic growth would probably not alarm the IBA so much. Understandably, the Authority's officers and members worry more if the public's anxieties coincide with their own.

Allied with the broadcasters' natural interest in receiving feedback about their programmes is a different, though not unrelated, movement in academic and professional thinking about television. Stuart Hood coined the phrase 'accountability, accessibility and responsibility' in the late 1960s, and it has served as a useful and powerful slogan for those who have been concerned with the medium over the past ten years.

The phrase has, in fact, passed into the lexicon of the medium alongside the older 'information, education and entertainment' of the BBC Charter and the 'public interest, necessity and convenience' of America's 1934 Communications Act. Like its more established elders, 'accountability, accessibility

Rod Allen

Rod Allen, formerly editor of the magazine Broadcast, joined London Weekend Television earlier this year to produce Look Here, a television programme about television. Here he considers some of the problems—and the possibilities—of television looking at itself.

and responsibility' is a phrase which has had less concise analysis than it deserves. The Annan Committee on the Future of Broadcasting rightly thought that it had led to some powerfully muddled thinking. Yet the broadcasting authorities and the government have taken the idea on board to the extent of giving it respectability. The word 'accountability', in particular, is much bandied about—with some dubious results—in the White Paper on Broadcasting published in July in response to the Annan Report.

It was against this background of the *embourgeoisement* of Hood's warcry that London Weekend Television decided it should mount a programme dealing with the medium of television itself. The idea seemed simple and admirable. It television has a duty to be accountable, accessible and responsible, then it should be able to put together a programme which would go some way towards fulfilling those objectives. It should discuss some of the issues surrounding television in an analytical and (if possible) independently journalistic manner; and it should allow viewers themselves—and the various pressure groups who have a view about television—a modicum of access to communicate their opinions via TV, and to challenge some of the decision-makers who wield power in the television structure.



Left: the Home Secretary, Merlyn Rees, on 'Look Here'. Above: Andrew Neil talks to James Brabazon and Stella Evans

The impetus came from a number of directions. The IBA had intimated that its contractors ought to create programmes which would offer the opportunity for viewers' complaints to be aired. John Birt, controller of current affairs and features at LWT, had long nurtured an ambition to mount a programme about the medium of television itself—an ambition fortunately shared by programme controller Michael Grade and head of current affairs Barry Cox. I had also argued, through the columns of *Broadcast*, for a programme of this kind. So we called it *Look Here*—the title was actually thought up by LWT's chairman John Freeman—and it started its monthly run of 45-minute programmes on 23 May this year.

Simple? Not so simple. For a new producer, confronting the practical problems of putting a television programme together within the context of a large institutional structure, it turns out to be a fascinating introduction to the art of the possible, which is what television programme production seems to be. But for a journalist pursuing a topic which has concerned him for ten years of his professional life, it provides a swift disassembly of some cherished notions.

Of these notions, the most important is one shared by the broadcasters, the regulatory institutions which control them, and many of the activists, academics and observers who variously irritate the institutions and contribute to their thinking about the medium. And that is the notion which claims that the ordinary viewer is capable of contributing on an informed basis to a serious debate about television. That is not to underestimate the viewer, nor to indulge in television's favourite pastime of putting down the audience. The problem is that because television has never been presented—by television itself or, by and large, by most of the newspapers—as a

topic suitable for debate, as an area in which even informed public opinion is capable of an impact on the decisions made by TV's managers, the public is wholly unaccustomed to the possibility of participation in such a debate. It has not been offered the information with which to do so, nor has it been offered the suggestion that it should gird itself with the apparatus necessary to do so.

Amid all the clamour for participation and access, this fact seems conveniently to have been forgotten. The moment you actually invite public participation, however, it becomes embarrassingly clear. The letters and calls flow in, of course—our first invitation to the public to let us know what they think, which consisted of editorial publicity in *TV Times*, ads in some of the weeklies and quite substantial on-air promotion, drew about 500 responses, and the continuing appeal for letters and opinions made in each programme pulls in a respectable number of letters each month. But the letters themselves—which range from the endearing through the well thought out to the downright loony—tend predominantly to address programme content alone, completely within broadcasting's own values. The letters which challenge those values, which address the key questions around which a debate on television broadcasting should revolve, are few and far between. The strands of thought with which as a journalist writing about broadcasting I had been most familiar for a decade—bias and 'balance', committed journalism, censorship, the ethics of 'intrusive' documentary and of drama-documentary, and the relationship between structures and output—were missing. The audience, without external points of reference, casts its thoughts in terms of comparing programmes with each other. The agenda is wholly set by the broadcasters; and it's no real surprise that the public, excluded from the debate, obediently follows that agenda.

It could be said that this points to a flaw in the thinking that went into the development of *Look Here*. It's quite likely that when a 'complaints' programme was first mooted in the elegant drawing rooms of the IBA's headquarters it wasn't seen in these terms. The original idea was probably to accommodate that feedback from viewers (and, indeed, participants in TV programmes) which fell a little short of the formal complaints machinery or the libel courts: special interest groups who felt improperly represented, interviewees who believed that they had been unfairly edited, as well, perhaps, as the sub-Whitehouse brigade (and their left-wing counterparts who propose different kinds of censorship).

But so far—and as I write we're only three shows into the series—the insertion, by John Birt, Barry Cox and myself, of a journalistic element into the programme's format will probably turn out to be the most important element of the idea. For it is through this journalistic element, in which we report on television just as other current affairs programmes report on, say, the economy, that we are beginning to be able to reveal to the public (or such part of it as is still watching TV in London at 11.15 on a Saturday night) some of the questions which concern the industry and its observers. And in this way we are starting to lay out some of the discursive equipment with which the audience

can start to tackle the issues which lie at the roots of the debate about television.

So far, we have dealt journalistically with light entertainment, in a programme which sought to reveal the commercial and ratings considerations which underlie the scheduling and content of much of TV's entertainment output; with Northern Ireland, in an item which tried to show the audience the constraints which surround the programme-maker who wants to deal with this topic; and with the plans for an Open Broadcasting Authority contained in the government's White Paper on Broadcasting, in a programme which found itself having to do the reporting job which the other current affairs programmes mostly failed to do, since most of them were off the air for the summer (we interviewed Lord Annan, which no other television programme did, and brought the Home Secretary into the studio to defend the White Paper). By the time this article appears, we shall have tackled the conflict between programme-makers' concepts of editorial freedom and responsibility in the context of a film report from the Edinburgh Television Festival, and the implications of technological advances like teletext and home video in an Outside Broadcast report from the International Broadcasting Convention at Wembley in September. For the future, we are planning a programme on election coverage (if there is an election), and a major special on violence on television—though, since we are a current affairs programme, all these plans are quite properly subject to change in the light of developments.

By contrast, the 'access' elements of the programme have covered rather different ground. We had a viewer complaining about explicit sex scenes (well, nudity, anyway) in LWT's *People Like Us*. We took up a challenge from Ed Buscombe in a *Time Out* article about football on TV (Buscombe complained that TV never discussed its own output on air, so we offered him time on *Look Here* to talk about his theories of football coverage, and brought on Thames' head of sport, Sam Leitch, to reply). We have had a viewer complaining about the lack of programmes from Europe, and a publican complaining that the stations close down just as he (and thousands of other shift and unsocial hours workers) is ready to put his feet up in front of the telly. There was a good studio debate between the national secretary of the Prison Officers' Association and Roger Mills, executive producer of the BBC's *Inside Story*, about the representation of prison officers on TV; and Laurie Marsh of Classic Cinemas complained about TV's over-use of feature films—a complaint which was roundly countered by Alasdair Milne, managing director of BBC Television and a member of the Interim Action Committee on the Film Industry.

We were especially pleased to get people like Milne and Leitch to answer viewers' opinions, because it suggested to us that the industry in general was willing not merely to take us seriously, but also to recognise its duty to be in some way publicly accountable for its behaviour, although that accountability is severely restricted by the law in one particular way, which is described below. But as you can see from the list of topics dealt with in the 'access' section, the kinds of things that engage viewers (and our accessees are genuinely drawn from a cross-section of the

letters we received and from the various pressure groups acting on the industry) are not the same as those which engage professional critics, journalists, observers, or indeed the practitioners themselves.

Curiously enough, one of the most effective 'access' items we have had in the show was in the first episode, when we received (in a somewhat roundabout fashion) a complaint from a male prostitute, 'Terry', about the way he had been treated by *The London Weekend Show*, LWT's unique current affairs programme for teenagers. 'Terry' had been threatened physically by a group of his fellow male prostitutes after appearing on the programme, and he felt that *The London Weekend Show* had not adequately warned him about the consequences of his appearance on the programme. We interviewed Andy Mayer, producer of the show, and tried to establish whether TV programmes in general took enough care of the people they use as their raw material.

What was interesting about this episode was not so much its effect on 'Terry'—he probably can't work in the West End again, and that may be no bad thing—but its effect on Andy Mayer. Mayer had never been interviewed for television before, and we did to him all the things he had done to interviewees for his programmes in the past—invaded his office, shone bright lights at him, made him sit this way and that until we got the angle right, and even had a camera breakdown (not intentional) which obliged him to give the interview all over again. He says that as a result of the experience he will think even more carefully about what happens to people who appear on programmes for which he is responsible—and that was a valuable and entirely unexpected side-effect of the whole venture. We often find that people in the industry whom we interview for the show have never appeared on television before, which says something about the level of accountability that has been operating to date.

It is, however, frequently a delight to interview people whose life is spent trying to get concise and clear statements out of inexperienced interviewees because at last they have the chance to do what they've been trying to get other people to do for years.

One major block to accountability, though, is the law. Section 4 (2) of the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act—in a wholly commendable attempt to stop people using the stations over which they had control from pushing their own political opinions—forbids directors or officers of programme contractors or the IBA from appearing on independent television to talk about matters of public concern or policy. The IBA—which is campaigning to get this bit of the law repealed, and will probably succeed if the recent White Paper gets anywhere near the Statute Book—has interpreted 'public policy and concern' very strictly, to the extent that if we decide to tackle a topic, it must automatically become a matter of public concern, and restricted persons are thereby debarred from appearing on our programme.

This clearly creates a lunacy. When we did our programme on Northern Ireland, which was sparked off by the IBA's banning of an episode of Thames TV's *This Week* about alleged brutality by the Royal Ulster Constabulary, it was obvious that the proper kind

of person to answer the charges being made by programme-makers would have been Lady Plowden, chairman of the IBA, or Sir Brian Young, its director-general. Yet neither of them could appear, under the terms of the Act. Not even Jeremy Isaacs, who had heroically defended *This Week* against the IBA (and handed the banned footage over for transmission by the BBC) could appear, since he was a director of Thames. We were forced to fly Rex Cathcart, a former Northern Ireland regional officer of the IBA, from Belfast to put the IBA's point of view (not easy, since he rather disagrees with it); and we were reduced to reading a statement from the IBA over a caption—which does not lend itself to clear debate about the issues.

This makes nonsense of some of the good intentions behind the programme. The key questions of ITV policy cannot be answered by those responsible for their implementation. Neither Sir Denis Forman of Granada nor John Freeman of LWT, both tireless campaigners for an ITV-2, could appear on our show about the fourth channel. Producers and heads of department (not 'officers' of companies under the Act) can be grilled; those who set the framework under which they operate can't be. Oddly, those same restricted persons can appear quite freely on BBC Television—and, equally, people from the very top of the BBC can appear on ITV: which means that we find ourselves dealing quite often with topics touching the BBC, making us doubly grateful for the co-operation and assistance we always get from them. We're learning ways of getting round the 4 (2) requirements—officers of the Independent Television Companies' Association and of the jointly owned company Independent Television Publications, for instance, escape the rigours of the law—but some of those ways must look decidedly odd to the viewer.

It does challenge the idea of 'accountability' laid out for the programme, but it doesn't completely destroy it. The most common reaction we have had from fellow professionals about the show is that it is very exciting to see the issues which concern them discussed, for more or less the first time, on television. Ordinary viewers' reactions are a little harder to gauge. The ratings are fairly inexact indicators when applied to the kind of time period we occupy, although not completely useless. Show 1 got a resoundingly disappointing 3 TVRating points; Show 2 climbed to an encouraging 5; and the third show reached a level of 8, which represents a substantial number of people. More encouraging, once people tune into the programme, according to the ratings, they seem to stay with it; the difference in audience level between the show's two parts has not so far been greater than a fall-off of one rating point, which is well within the margin of error. (One rating point equals one per cent of the available TV households in the London area.)

We are conscious of pitching the programme at a level above that which would appeal to the 'ordinary' viewer. Our assumption, which is based on nothing more than instinct, is that the viewer has on the whole tuned in to *Look Here* out of choice—otherwise he or she would be watching the late night horror movie on BBC-2. We aim, in our minds at least, at the interested lay person. This means that the interested

professional sometimes finds that there's not much new in the programme for him or her. (Equally, though, we reassure ourselves that professionals watching the programme know that we're not aiming at them.) Very heavy promotion on the air aids the viewer in choosing to watch *Look Here*; LWT is generous with promotional time, and we take care to make interesting and attractive 'promos' for the programme. These are shown in the weeks when we're not on the air as well as the day before and the day of transmission.

Does the reaction of the audience, as indicated by the ratings, suggest that there is a genuine public appetite for discussion of television on television? There are so many different factors at work—our presenter, Andrew Neil, has a nice face; people who want to watch ATV's pop show *Revolver* in the London area have to sit through *Look Here* first, and so on—that it is almost impossible to tell, and without specific research we won't be able to. People are very interested in television, but naturally cast this interest in terms of programmes rather than in terms of structures or policy; the conceptual leap that is necessary to relate output to structures takes time and (more important) interest. Programme-makers tend to believe that they can 'do things' to the audience—make them more aware of the world around them, or more appreciative of the problems of the economy, or more conscious of the nature of beauty—but viewers seem to want no such thing. On the contrary, they want television to do nothing more for them than entertain and, occasionally, inform. Programme-makers regard it as an active medium, on the whole; the viewer treats it passively—not abjectly passively, or stupidly passively, but simply as one of the utilities that are available.

In one sense, then, *Look Here*, and its interaction with the public, is more of an educator of programme-makers than of viewers, not that one monthly programme in the London area alone will have much effect on the collective consciousness of the broadcasting community (although its effect is there, if only in the discussions in clubs and canteens among professionals which it generates). Equally, though, it could in the long term provide viewers with the material necessary to engage in debate about broadcasting policy and structures, and in its turn force the broadcasters to be more responsive to public opinion about topics other than programme content. It would be more useful in this context if more ITV companies took up the challenge thrown out by the IBA to produce programmes similar to *Look Here*—the original idea was that each ITV company should do one, but only London Weekend and Granada (with the resuscitation of its excellent 'Open Night' format) have responded.

On a more personal level, what have I had to learn about TV's institutions and the process of programme production? One interesting piece of self-education has been discovering—from my own reactions—how broadcasters measure their own performance. I was seized with unconsolable depression when the press didn't pick up on the fact that

Film Reviews

Convoy

'The purpose of the convoy,' declares its involuntary leader, when pressed for an explanation of this procession of juggernauts rolling through the Southwest, attended by angry swarms of lawmen, 'is to keep moving.' It is a wonderfully terse, not to say existential, summation of a movie whose purpose otherwise might seem to be to decorate a slender anecdote with a gently unfolding kaleidoscope of moods. And its irony—the faster the convoy moves, the more moss it gathers in all the nation's grumbles and grievances, which might have been drifting in the ether, waiting for just such a vehicle as this—proves both the theme of the film and the key to its success. Only when the convoy stops moving long enough to take itself seriously (a danger *Convoy* courts but briefly), is it likely to betray itself. Judiciously, the trucking ballad by C.W. McCall from which the film is derived punctuates the soundtrack to ensure that the political fable continues to ride on the good-humoured caricature and 'subversive' citizen-band jargon of the song.

But the airiness, the dreamy precisions of music, have done more than lighten the tone of recent Peckinpah films, making *Convoy* (Columbia-EMI-Warner) his most diversely enjoyable, directly humorous work since *The Ballad of Cable Hogue*. To a large extent, they lead the film by the nose, determining where it is going before the on-screen events, and liberating Peckinpah in the process from the demands of plot. In one extraordinary musical glissade—during the chase along the dust-clogged desert trail into New Mexico—comic ramble, lilting waltz and elegiac interludes somehow spiral into one another. Formally, this is Peckinpah's most audacious film in that the 'story' it tells is largely the orchestration of its moods, which allows individual sequences (that magical chase) and even isolated shots (the strange, other-worldly sense of suspension as we watch from inside a police car toppling down an embankment) to expand beyond their proper limits, taking over the film virtually to 'tell' that story in their own terms.

Which is not to say that *Convoy* is not characterised by some familiar themes and patterns of conflict—let alone generic elements, since much of its pleasure derives from Peckinpah's relish for a subject that is the closest thing possible to a modern-day Western. Whatever awkwardness exists, in fact, seems due to an initial tension between old structures and the new, lighthearted, but infinitely suggestive atmosphere. The weakest section is undoubtedly the first fifteen or twenty minutes of exposition, which may be necessary to establish some basic narrative conditions—the antagonism between the brotherhood of truckers and the guardians of the law, and between the self-contained hero and a heroine whose own independence is more negotiable and 'other directed' (she works as a photographer)—but looks as if it must inevitably throw too much weight on the colourful figments of McCall's ballad.

'It was Arizona, noon,' as the song has it, when trucker Martin Penwald (Kris Kristofferson), known as 'Rubber Duck' on the citizen-band wavelengths, is passed on a desert highway by Melissa (Ali MacGraw), elegantly but provocatively ensconced in a sports car. They acknowledge each other with some knowing

glances on his part and a few quick snapshots on hers—equated as sexual innuendo by a leering, wide-angle camera. Later, the Duck and two confrères, 'Pig Pen' (Burt Young) and 'Spider Mike' (Franklyn Ajaye), are stopped by 'Dirty' Lyle Wallace (Ernest Borgnine), highway patrolman and a blood enemy of the Duck's for so long that they are better known to each other than friends. After Lyle has extracted the requisite bribes, an exchange with the Duck portentously establishes their relationship, and kinship: when told that the Teamsters Union will shortly be signing up the police as they have the truckers, Lyle angrily asserts his independence, one thing he claims in common with the Duck. 'Two,' comes the reply, 'there aren't many of us left.' Subsequently, goaded by some disrespectful badinage on the air, Lyle attempts to arrest Spider Mike in a diner; a brawl develops with predictably violent but unexpectedly comic exaggeration, and the Duck (having already agreed to give Melissa a lift) takes off for the state line, with his friends following as the embryonic convoy.

Two things, however, intervene to prevent the threatened abstraction and intensification of the Lyle/Rubber Duck conflict (with precedents from *The Wild Bunch* to *Cross of Iron*) and the Rubber Duck/Melissa romance (à la *The Getaway*, perhaps). One is the musical mode of the plot, which refuses to allow a self-destructive determinism to close in on hero and anti-hero, even though their confrontation touches some established bases (the stand-off on the bridge to Mexico; the resolution in derisive laughter). Instead, anarchic anger is diffused in populist comedy, with delightful results: the film and its ever-growing,

road-hogging behemoth become a kind of wish-fulfilment machine, to which each individual and community it passes can attach their own banner of protest—a situation which opens up a surprisingly sunny vista of a land running riot with good-natured disrespect for authority, eager to be represented by such a freewheeling symbol but more likely to be exploited by the politicians who gather darkly in the second half of the film.

In New Mexico, the convoy and a joyous nighttime encampment of fellow travellers rendezvous with Governor Haskins (Seymour Cassel), who offers to bestow political respectability by taking the Duck and his protest (he who has protested nothing more than that he is running for his life) as a national cause to Washington. The Duck finally refuses simply because the convoy is needed elsewhere—Spider Mike, who has left to join his pregnant wife, has been captured in Alvarez, Texas, and is being held there as bait by Lyle. The Duck's decision to abandon his followers is challenged by Melissa—forcing a somewhat dubious opposition between the hero and the masses who have fallen in behind him (Peckinpah again resorts to the stiffly spacious compositions that earlier gave a kind of ideological formality to the Duck's confrontation with Lyle). But a moment later, the film moves securely back into its own realm with a long, lyrical sequence as the convoy, once more a figment of romance and myth, drives by night to the rescue of Spider Mike. It's 'Texas, dawn', as the trucks thunder down on Alvarez: 'They could tell by the smell it was Trucker's Hell, and the Devil was Dirty Lyle.'

But what also diverts the film from the apocalyptic implications of such lyrics is the surprisingly genial nature of its antagonists. Both are presented as appropriately larger than life in their own spheres, but Lyle is put in perspective by the chaotic lawlessness that seems to be going on all around him, and the Duck proves to be amazingly conciliatory and unresentful towards the patrolman. He enquires solicitously if Lyle needs a 'meat wagon' after some spectacular car-borne acrobatics, and appears in the confrontation at the diner less as the rebellious flouter of authority than as a bewildered child trying to placate some bullish father/Jehovah.

Such configurations suggest a new mellowing in the creator of *Convoy*, a suggestion supported by such inconsequential details as the fact that the last

Ali MacGraw and Kris Kristofferson in 'Convoy'



image of the film is of an old couple—whose antique car had been left in the dust by the barrelling convoy—shyly kissing, and by a general feeling that, after the terminal situations explored by Peckinpah's last half dozen films, *Convoy* is almost glowingly affirmative. It is plotted, after all, between a birth (Spider Mike's determination to be home for the birth of his child sparks off the brawl with Lyle), a marriage (which is what Melissa is on her way to photograph when she is sidetracked by the convoy, and is presumably implied by her relationship with the Duck, who is already married with two children), and the resolution of a funeral—that-isn't. Such lyricism and full-hearted romanticism conclusively turn the other side of Peckinpah; *Convoy* is reminiscent of his delightful, formative TV show *The Losers*, is what *The Getaway* should have been, and is what was promised by his aborted project to film Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*.

RICHARD COMBS

Hullabaloo over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures

Describing the genesis of *The Aspern Papers*—and what better reference point for James Ivory's latest film?—Henry James fondly recalled 'the air of the old time Italy' that invested a story he had heard about Mary Shelley's long-lived half-sister Jane Clairmont and the ardent American Shelleyite who became her lodger in the forlorn hope that her estate might perhaps yield some priceless literary documents. 'I delight,' he noted, 'in a palpable imaginable visitable past.'

Palpable indeed, the past in *Hullabaloo over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures* that comes treading on the heels of Lady Gwyneth McLaren Pugh (Peggy Ashcroft), the envoy of impeccably exalted Anglo-Indian credentials who has come to rescue the Maharajah's collection of miniatures and to entrust them to the safer keeping of a British museum. Imaginable, too, as Lady G. assumes command by hereditary right, misappropriating the Maharajah's personal bathroom, chuckling over the social absurdity whereby he and his sister still answer to the names of Georgie and Bonnie imposed by a Scottish nanny, and serenely impervious to any possibility of dropped bricks ('Everyone likes the Maharajah . . . of course, some of them gave trouble'). And finally visited, as Lady G. conjures from the 20s the ghost of a pretty and rather dashing young flapper who danced ecstatically through the Indian night before being found

mysteriously dead in the purdah car the next morning. 'One likes to think she died from an excess of happiness.'

Still nostalgically haunting India, if only from its English cemeteries, this ghost of the British Raj has to combat the spectral presence of the future as another, and substantially dollar-backed, bid for the miniatures comes from Clark Haven (Larry Pine), American private collector and heir to a peach canning fortune. Unlike Lady G., Haven is hesitant, polite, and more than a little disapproving of a country where towel rails come apart in the hand, toilets that flush are an unexpected bonus, and the smells and the people can only be tolerated because he will go anywhere to track down rare treasures.

Meanwhile, India herself remains neutral and enigmatic, ever watchful for the main chance. The Maharajah (Victor Banerjee), a keen amateur photographer dreaming of modifying his playboy image by turning professional, has no interest in the miniatures that lie forgotten under dusty wrappings in a room guarded like Aladdin's cave by a huge and mute genie, aside from a vague feeling that they ought to remain in India. His sister Bonnie (Aparna Sen), brooding over a loveless marriage to a fanatical sportsman, is determined that they shall be sold to finance a quest for the mysterious something that is lacking from her life. And Sri Narain (Saeed Jaffrey), curator of this precious Tasveer Collection but operating as a picture dealer on the side, plays everybody's game with a smooth self-effacement that suggests a private ace in the hole somewhere.

In a subtle and exquisitely funny comedy of manners, partners are chosen and positions assumed for a stately minuet of intrigues and cross-hatched plots. Working hand-in-hand to save the miniatures from destruction by damp, white ants and neglect, Haven woos Bonnie while Lady G. sets her pretty companion Lynn (Jane Booker) on to Georgie. Dutifully double-crossing his supposed allies, Sri Narain is instructed by his master to stage a fire under cover of which the collection, presumed destroyed, can be despatched to Calcutta and dispersed for more profitable sale; and is in turn double-crossed when Georgie substitutes some of his photographs for the pictures in the delusory hope that they will arouse more enthusiasm and prove as saleable as the miniatures.

Alas for the vanity of human endeavours, but when the music stops, the miniatures are once more languishing under their dusty wraps and everybody is back precisely where he or she started, though no longer quite the same person as before. Just before the fire supposedly destroys the miniatures in a

blaze of fireworks, Georgie impersonates Santa Claus at a Christmas party (delightfully idiotic, with nuns leading a posse of Indian children in a perilous rendering of 'Jingle Bells' and Georgie resorting to the time-honoured 'Ho! Ho! Ho!' in order to discomfit miniature plotters caught in an attempt to drug the guardian genie); and from this point on, like a precious gift magically erasing all feelings of frustration and loss, a joyous sense of reconciliation begins to overtake each of the characters.

I suppose this must be described—with due apologies to Ivory's direction, which is never guilty of such heavy-handedness in evoking the moribund desolation that invades the fantastically ornate palaces now that the rajahs of fabled wealth are extinct—as deriving from the realisation that art should serve life, rather than the other way round. Typical of the film's delicacy is a scene in which Lady G., wandering the English cemetery in mourning for the supposed demise of her miniature-children, is invited home by the vaguely conscience-stricken Sri Narain to view his most treasured and private collection. Impatiently she leafs through a handful of patently inferior miniatures until refreshments are served. Suddenly, with her gesture of flipping the protective tissues from the miniatures, Lady G. lifts the veil from Sri Narain's wife to reveal a plump, pockmarked, but radiantly vital face. Sri Narain smiles: 'My most precious and private collection.'

The real delight of *Hullabaloo* (stunningly well acted by the entire cast, it was made, amazingly, in four weeks for £100,000 as a joint enterprise with London Weekend Television, on whose South Bank Show it was first screened) is that its meaning is defined, in the Jamesian manner, by a series of reverberations that say everything while seemingly saying nothing. The fact, for instance, that the first time we see the exquisite miniatures (many borrowed from the Victoria and Albert Museum, and telling a story that reflects a mirror image of the one in the film), they are accompanied by a dryly academic commentary from Haven that drains the Indian life away in a flow of Western scholarship. The second time, when it has been acknowledged that the miniatures are where they should remain as a part of India, they are allowed to speak for themselves within a hush of contentment.

Or again, more esoterically but illustrating the way every detail is calculated in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's marvellous script, the fact that the Tasveer Collection is so named. 'Tasveer' means not only 'painting' but 'photograph'; and the fine line between eternal verities and transient realities, already erased in Georgie's mind, is finally abolished as the proven unimportance of the disputed artworks affords to each his own moment of ineradicable happiness. 'Well, she's here for ever anyway,' murmur Lady G. and Lynn as they watch the ghostly flapper from the past materialise once more to echo her tragically short-lived but blissful butterfly felicity. 'She had a good time here.'

TOM MILNE

'Hullabaloo over Georgie and Bonnie's Pictures': Saeed Jaffrey, Peggy Ashcroft. Photograph: Mary Ellen Mark



Chinese Roulette and Despair

An unlikely couple, *Chinese Roulette* and *Despair* are akin in that they mark a break in the film-making strategy Rainer Werner Fassbinder has espoused in the 70s. Having made the change, they then strike out in new directions that are broadly comparable if not equally successful. As an art film of international pedigree, with a script by Tom Stoppard from Vladimir Nabokov's novel, *Despair* (1978) could scarcely be more distinct from the kind of film-making heralded by *The Merchant of Four Seasons* in 1971: popular films for German audiences, in which political issues are raised with paradigmatic simplicity, through a narrative style which equally aims at the greatest clarity (even naiveté) by pirating the escapist melodrama of Hollywood's heyday. Since Fassbinder's message about oppression, and its social and emotional

forms, was intended for a mass audience and not a coterie of cinephiles, his self-ordained task was to 'create' that audience by recreating the communal style of the greatest popular cinema in history. Although *Chinese Roulette* (1976) still relates to that tradition—it is a melodramatic chamber piece, in which the romantic triangles of four *haut bourgeois* characters tensely overlap—it pointedly introduces 'foreign' elements into Fassbinder's usual stock company of players, and its political references (the Nazi past, contemporary political terrorism) supply not so much a message as teasing clues to the games its people play.

Both films, in fact, are dominated by an intellectual, puzzle-making mood. But if the key to the acrostic in *Chinese Roulette* is Fassbinder's familiar disgust with bourgeois institutions, and in *Despair* his prescience of fascism in the identity crisis of poor, mad Hermann Hermann, the answers never satisfactorily account for the structures that contain them. This whiff of formalism might also have something to do in both cases with their peculiarly literary conceits. Although the essential deception of *Despair*—Hermann's belief that he has a double, who turns out to bear no resemblance to him—has inevitably been eliminated by the visualising of the book, the plot still turns on Hermann's mania for talking fictions into being. (Fassbinder finally loses control of the subject mainly because of the discrepancy between the brilliant, art deco density he lends these fantasies and the simplistic political meaning he tries to read into them.) The last third of *Chinese Roulette* is taken up with the parlour game of the title, in which a discrepancy again emerges (this time more artfully exploited) between the players' manifest anxiety and the oblique, 'literary' rules of the game which has occasioned it. One side is invited to guess which individual the other side has chosen as its victim by their answers to questions like, what would this person have been in the Third Reich? what would be the most suitable manner of his execution?

Artificiality, as a theme and a stylistic strategy, has been common to all Fassbinder's films in the 70s. The rhetoric of melodrama boosts the emotional content of his material, while it highlights by schematising all the social mechanisms of repression and control. *Chinese Roulette* (Cinegate) pushes such artificiality up a few stops, until it arrives at a hysterical intensity and formal extravagance not far removed from the horror movie. The conditions for such a transference are casually established by the plot: the film begins with a journey out of the city into the country, the credits sliding across the windscreen of the speeding car in arch-Hollywood manner, and the sequence as a whole promising fateful conjunctions out of *Psycho* by way of Chabrol. Most of the subsequent action takes place in a properly restored version of the old dark house.

Wealthy industrialist Gerhard Christ (Alexander Allerson) is taking his mistress Irene (Anna Karina) for a weekend at his château, having put off his wife Ariane (Margit Carstensen) with an elaborate bluff about a business trip to Oslo. Ariane, however, is also and unknowingly headed for the château with her lover, Christ's secretary Kolbe (Ulli Lommel), and the two couples, after decorously adjusting to this situation, discover that their embarrassment was engineered by the Christs' crippled daughter Angela (Andrea Schober). She can thereafter be heard, for the duration of the weekend, clumping about the château on her crutches, presiding over the misery of her elders with the satisfaction of a cherubic Bela Lugosi.

It is Angela who stage-manages the climactic game of Chinese roulette—and the barely suppressed state of all-out war between her and her mother which determines the film's mordant view of family life. Angela brings with her an entourage of dolls, their sinister presence—especially allied to that of Angela's mute and beatific but somehow powerful governess, Traunitz (Macha Méril)—more effectively catching the atmosphere of stunted, unnatural relationships than the speech in which Angela tidily relates her parents' marital



'Chinese Roulette': Alexander Allerson, Ulli Lommel

derelictions to the onset of her disease and the realisation that it was incurable. Fassbinder pans across to the sentinel circle of dolls at the end of the scene in which Angela bitterly asks the housekeeper's son Gabriel if he would sleep with someone who is crippled. And if the identification between Angela and the dolls paradoxically 'centres' the film—as an image of evil both helpless and all-destroying, both inanimate and malevolent—it also prompts speculation about political meanings beyond the script's rather cursory clues about neo-fascism. Is Traunitz the 'puppet master' directing Angela's campaign of hate—seeking through her some redress for crimes ambivalently conjured by both the German military ancestry of her name and the presence of a French actress in the role? It is Traunitz, after all, on whom Ariane suddenly and inexplicably turns, after discovering that she has been the target of Angela's game and after first levelling her pistol at her daughter. In one of the most surreal yet strangely apposite scenes, Gabriel hears pop music coming from behind closed doors, and peers inside to see the normally impassive Traunitz performing a little jig with Angela's crutches.

The customary implications of Fassbinder's bourgeois melodramas are at once intensified and abstracted by the horror movie milieu. A familiar kind of hyper-naturalism prevails in those scenes where characters and camera seem to be conducting a delirious dance of death—circling each other through the vistas of glass and coldly glittering bric-à-brac. But where this thoroughly excavated naturalism shades into a more menacingly opaque expressionism. Fassbinder slyly manages to generalise his disgust and his desire to *épater le bourgeois*. He might be jabbing at a state of mind that cannot be precisely located in present-day Germany, seeking broader metaphors behind his local targets, while turning inward (abandoning the communal mythology of his 70s films) for his ammunition. Private meanings appear to cluster about the film, and even the concrete political clues deepen rather than elucidate the air of mystery. And Fassbinder explicitly chooses to end with an enigma: he cuts to the outside of the château as a second gunshot (its author and victim unknown) rings out, and freezes the frame as a shadowy (avenging?) procession of figures moves into view.

Oddly enough, much of the black humour of *Chinese Roulette*, particularly its relish for casting a crippled child as its wicked master of ceremonies, might have been invented by Vladimir Nabokov. Exchanging references, as it were, Fassbinder's adaptation of *Despair* (Gala) occasionally sallies some of the horror imagery—Hermann Hermann

(Dirk Bogarde) wakes from a nightmare in which he confronts his 'double' in a decaying hotel, while thunder rumbles overhead—more successfully incorporated in *Chinese Roulette*. If consistently carried through, however, such a style would not have been inappropriate to *Despair*, since it is part of Nabokov's riddling way with fiction to call for just those kinds of 'dramatic' effects that emphasise the author's presence. And if anything accounts for the failure of Fassbinder's version, for all the decorative brilliance with which he reproduces some of Nabokov's *trompe l'oeil* imagery, it is his inability to find any overall 'holding' metaphor for the novel's shifting levels of fantasy. There is no cinematic equivalent for Nabokov's final triumphant sleight of hand, collapsing Hermann's tissue of self-deception the better to reveal the stamp of his own artistic design. To an extent, Fassbinder and Stoppard attempt to make the cinema itself fulfil that function. They pick up Nabokov's one or two casual hints about movie artifice, and elaborate them first into a deft hall-of-mirrors effect, satirically reflecting the fictive processes going on in Hermann's mind with a sequence in which he watches a silent melodrama showing how an evil twin attempts to escape the law by adopting his good twin's identity, and then into a less interesting climax, in which Hermann's confusion of reality and fantasy becomes simply a symptom of his madness (which is close to, but not the same as, Nabokov's final series of disappearing tricks).

But if anything, Fassbinder is really moving in the opposite direction. He attempts to find some solid ground in which to root his stateless (Russian-emigré, possibly Jewish) hero, and his dream of committing the perfect crime, by stressing his real political danger in 30s Germany. To this end, he also boosts the pathetic quality (in terms of both social comedy and some tentative homosexual attraction) of Hermann's relationship with Felix (Klaus Löwitsch), the tramp he takes to be his double and whose carefully staged death will, he imagines, release him from his present life (including the imminent failure of his chocolate factory, an extraordinary creation in jarring shades of mauve and brown). As Hermann, in transports of self-delight, sets the stage for his supreme act of creative genius—a crime to shame amateurs of the art like Conan Doyle and Dostoevsky, one in which 'the victim did it'—Fassbinder rearranges the little quirks which Hermann takes as evidence of his superior abilities in the gloomy imagery of alienation. He then adduces his own scenes of brownshirts and incipient political terror in neat explanation of the malady.

For a while, the film confidently operates in the same sardonic key as its source, piling on levels of unreality as Hermann romances his bovine wife Lydia (Andréa Ferreol) with reminiscences of Mother Russia. But it forever fixes Hermann in the same sharp, crystalline perspective as its splendidly artificial décor, never allowing one to relate to the other except in the ghostly, geometric patterns created by the ceaselessly roving camera, which might be looking (as in Fassbinder's more prosaic dramas) for the real toad at the centre of this baroquely unreal world. The objective view freezes—to rather solemn, pedantic effect—the subjective layers of the novel, which Nabokov steadily peeled away, disclosing in this act his true subject. Ironically, the cosmopolitan origins of *Despair* are belied by Fassbinder's determination to anchor it in local circumstances, and a parochial stylistic sophistication, while *Chinese Roulette* is freed from just such constraints by its rather Nabokovian playfulness and lack of formal inhibitions.

RICHARD COMBS

Cria Cuervos

Carlos Saura's film opens with a vignette of outrageous Freudian melodrama: nine-year-old Ana creeps through a large, darkened house to listen to her widowed army officer father make love to his latest mistress, then—after watching the distraught woman run away—enters the room to find her father dead—apparently as the result of poison administered by Ana in retribution for his neglect of her mother's feelings. Apparently: but we cannot be sure. Perhaps this act is only wish-fulfilment on the child's part, like the subsequent appearance of her mother. Already, anyhow, the melodramatic mood has been undercut by ambiguity, for *Cria Cuervos* (Gala) is nothing if not fragmentary and allusive in venturing on to the fraught terrain of childhood sensibility.

The jumble of family snapshots accompanying the opening titles functions as a correlative for Saura's mosaic approach as well as introducing a key visual theme. Subsequently we see Ana, her elder sister Irene and younger sister Maite, now being looked after by their mother's sister Paulina, killing time during the summer holiday by compiling a scrapbook of pop star pin-ups and the like. If the children are randomly storing up images for the future, their invalid grandmother seems, when we later see her wistfully surveying a collage of photos and postcards, to be testing out her memories of the past.

The linking of imagination and memory is the movie's stock-in-trade to the extent of permeating its structure. For while the action has a contemporary setting, it is in effect taking place in the past tense, since the narrative is punctuated by episodes in which a grown-up Ana comments directly to camera about her childhood (not, she says emphatically, a paradise of innocence) from a vantage point some twenty years in the future—a time which for the audience can exist only in the imagination. Geraldine Chaplin, who plays this role, also appears as Ana's mother in the episodes in which Ana remembers her or conjures up her presence as an imaginary comforter (though, since the mother is always seen wearing the same clothes, the distinction between remembered and imagined appearances is significantly blurred). This casting device admits alternative interpretations: on the one hand, Ana has ultimately 'become' the figure around whom her childhood fantasy of reassurance has been woven; on the other, Ana's childhood comforter is a materialisation of her own older self. But the alternatives are not mutually exclusive, and it is at their intersection that the movie can be said to be taking place.

Such a notion achieves witty expression in the sequence in which Ana and her sisters are driven by Paulina to visit the country home of Amelia (the father's mistress) and her husband, the sequence in which Ana's mother makes her most sustained imaginary appearance. Saura precedes this with the

adult Ana's recollection of the event, so that when he cuts from her to a forward travelling shot from behind the car, our impression is of a journey into the past, even though the child we see is in fact being taken forward into a novel experience. The visual resonance is amplified both by the fact that Ana is staring back the way she has come and by her being viewed from behind the glass of the rear window, as if in a time capsule.

The two-way pull exerted here rhymes with that created earlier, when Ana is seen playing in the rambling garden with her siblings, and is suddenly transported to the roof above to gaze down on the scene and to feel herself flying above it; the disequilibrium in the images offers its own comment on the impossibility of a distanced view of the self. The matter-of-fact strangeness of that episode serves to recall that, while *Cria Cuervos* may seem to owe a debt to Resnais, Saura is also in some measure a disciple of his compatriot Buñuel. There are reminders of Buñuel in the directness with which heightened details are made to co-exist with naturalistic observation: witness the passage in which Ana, chattering in the kitchen to the housekeeper Rosa, prevails upon her to expose her enormous bosom. One must also remember that this is a Spanish film, and undoubtedly possesses a political dimension, though this may well not be readily accessible to an outside eye. The rambling family mansion, gradually decaying behind walls placarded with garish billboards, presumably stands as a generalised symbol of the Francoist heritage (the movie was made in 1975) lurking behind the consumer bustle of modern Madrid. The enveloping nature of the house may be womblike, but its various trappings—the grandmother's wheelchair, the empty swimming pool—are redolent of life running out.

Ana's preoccupation with death fuses the film's personal and political levels, since it marks her as both the inheritor of an outmoded class and the potential agent of its destruction. Whether Ana's belief in the lethal properties of her tin of supposed poison is justified we never know—since Paulina emerges unharmed near the movie's end from an application of the powder, it may be that Ana's father actually died from other causes. What counts is her implicit trust in it and the communication of a perception of death which goes beyond that entailed in the burial of a pet guinea-pig. The sequence in which the sisters play a game of hide-and-seek, where the penalty for being found is a 'death' which can be reversed by a chanted invocation, functions in humorous counterpoint to one of the film's central themes.

For humour is by no means absent from the film—consider the nursery theatricals, with the diminutive Maite cheerfully resigned to the

Ana Torrent in 'Cria Cuervos'



supernumerary role of maid while her sisters lay claim to the leads. The sense of felt life stems particularly from the performances Saura has drawn from his cast, and above all from Ana Torrent, equally extraordinary here as in *Spirit of the Beehive*. It is true, though, that towards the end Saura allows the grip to slacken, and Paulina's burgeoning love affair with a brother officer of Ana's father is introduced to arbitrary and confusing effect.

The ending, however, is wholly effective: the long summer holiday is over and the children—in a scene full of quirky behavioural detail—are woken up and made ready for school. Over breakfast, Irene relates her dream of the night before ('then he put a pistol to my head... then I woke up'). The sisters emerge into the busy street and the camera moves briskly away until they merge into the throng of converging schoolgirls, then lifts away to survey the everyday panorama of shops and office blocks as the closing titles appear. On the soundtrack a pop song blares out (possibly in homage to *Viridiana*, which also concluded by sending its heroine out into the world to a pop accompaniment). The effect is satisfyingly ambiguous, as the music simultaneously speaks for the anodyne of admissable existence and refers us back to the images of Ana solitarily listening to her gramophone in the family home with its imprisoning memories.

TIM PULLEINE

Short Eyes

The prison movie forms a long established sub-genre of the American cinema. In a line that runs from *The Big House* (1930) via *Brute Force* (1947) to *Riot in Cell Block 11* (1954), various themes recur—jail as an extension of the underworld, a brutalising environment's creation of recidivism—but they are generally harnessed to the dynamics of some corporate endeavour, a riot or 'crash-out'. A modestly excellent 1969 movie, *Riot*, embraced these tendencies but allied them to a new-found freedom in illustrating racial antagonisms and, more particularly, sexual proclivities. Subsequent additions to the cycle have, in accord with the falling away of traditional generic forms, dropped the thriller element in favour of an increasingly explicit, not to say scatological, exploration of prison life. *Fortune and Men's Eyes* (1971) dwelt upon enforced homosexual allegiances in tracing the creation of a hardened jailbird. Now *Short Eyes* (Success) takes the interiorising process further—like *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, its origins are in the theatre—by chronicling not the making of a criminal but the demoralisation and destruction of a young first-time inmate at the hands of his fellow prisoners.

Davis (Bruce Davison) is in custody awaiting trial for indecently assaulting a child (the title proves to be prison argot for a child molester); the action, entirely confined to a cell block and day room on one 'floor' of a big city jail (the film was in fact shot in New York's Tombs Prison), records the process by which this terrified figure—insecure, middle-class, accused of the one crime which the prisoners' code excoriates—becomes catalyst of and scapegoat for the release of his fellow-inmates' pent-up rage.

The hideous fascination of the movie, scripted from his own play by Miguel Piñero, lies in its delineation of the divide and rule principle on which containment in the jail appears to depend. The society of the day room is, quite literally, territorially based: its groupings, in descending numerical strength, are those of blacks, Puerto Ricans, whites (or in the film's terms, niggers, spics, honkies) and an elaborate set of ground rules governing permitted areas of liaison is explained to the newcomer—prior to the discovery of his alleged offence—by his fellow white, Murphy (Joe Carberry). After Davis' secret becomes known, the various cabals combine in a united front of sorts against the 'freak', yet the persecution is predicated precisely upon their internecine loathing. In

a sustained sequence of orchestrated sadism the helpless Davis is literally bandied back and forth between Murphy, the Puerto Rican Paco (Shawn Elliott) and the black prisoner Ice (Nathan George) as each in turn seeks to assert his racial supremacy by outbidding the others in cruelty. Eventually the prisoners' council is convened—with schematic appropriateness, though ostensibly intended to improve the inmates' lot, it is resorted to only as a weapon of incoherent revenge—and, despite the intervention of the humanitarian Juan, blood lust wins the day. Both Paco and Ice finally shrink from murder, but the now frenzied Murphy—again appropriately, originally the victim's self-appointed ally—cuts Davis' throat, an act passed off by the authorities as suicide.

The twin set-pieces of Davis' humiliation and death are realised by the director, Robert M. Young, with a shocking cold-eyed precision. But elsewhere, though there is no gainsaying the palpably persuasive playing of a cast augmented by actual former convicts, Young's style tends to the flatly descriptive, trailing in the wake of a script whose construction is not notably cinematic: the introduction of Davis into the narrative is clumsily abrupt, and the dialogue passages between Davis and Juan, with the two of them conveniently isolated in the day room for long periods of time, are frankly theatrical. The writing, moreover, displays a rather pussyfooting racial 'balance'—so that, for instance, the most reptilian (Paco) and the most sympathetic (Juan) of the prisoners are both Puerto Ricans—and introduces a pointless *deus ex machina* with the climactic disclosure that Davis was in fact an innocent victim of mistaken identity (a device uneasily reminiscent of those 30s anti-lynching movies in which the point had to be made by having the 'wrong' man lynched).

Possibly, though, this reflects a hankering for dramatic shape on the film-makers' part. Certainly there are moments when *Short Eyes* seems to hark back to the prescribed forms of the prison pictures of yore: in, say, the brief humorous interludes of the impromptu jam session or the cockroach 'racetrack', or in the approximately circular structure by means of which the movie ends with the release on bail of the youngest prisoner, enjoined on pain of death to keep his guilty knowledge secret. One cannot help wondering whether these gestures toward an older format betoken some lack of faith in their jagged show of behaviourism. Perhaps the makers sensed that, as with that earlier fabricated slice of penal life *The Brig*, the relentlessness of their endeavour to incarcerate their audiences risks producing a defensive counter-reaction.

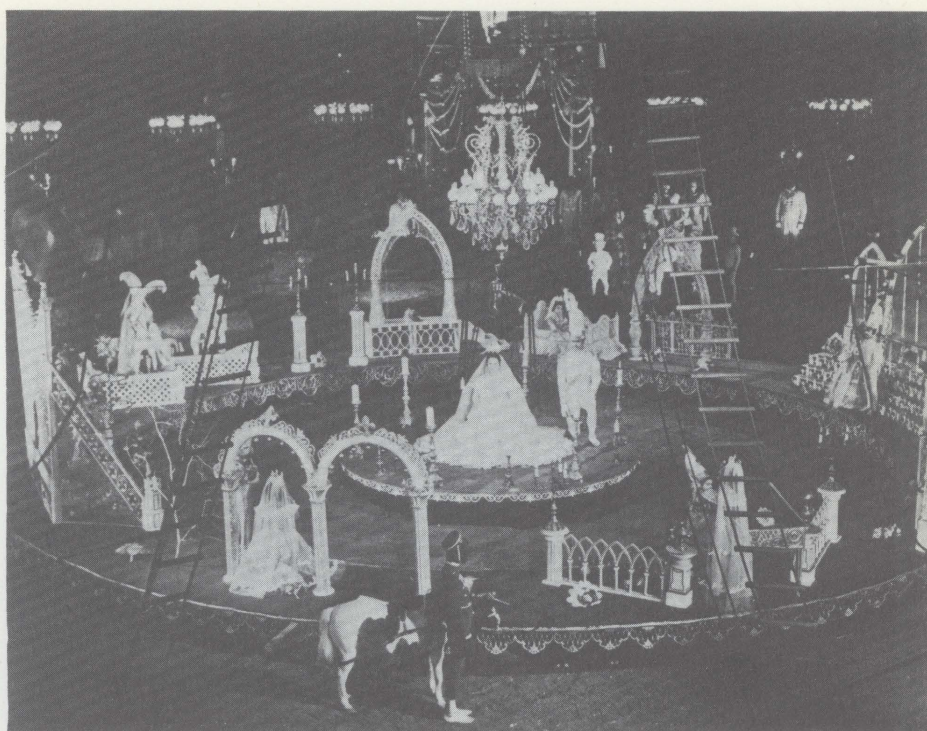
TIM PULLEINE

Lola Montès

Astonishingly, it is twenty-two years since Max Ophüls made *Lola Montès*. Astonishingly, because you forget how age creeps up on you; and it seems no time at all since all the furore and anguish over its release. Astonishingly, too, because it still looks so modern—saving that there is no one around any more who can combine such flamboyant spectacle with such fluidity, dexterity, lightness, invention.

Lola Montès (Artificial Eye), it is now clear, was Ophüls' swan-song, his masterpiece and his tragedy. As he had often done before, he accepted material no better than it ought to be: a popular fictionalised version by Cecil St. Laurent of *La Vie Extraordinaire de Lola Montès*—Lola, the girl who progressed from being plain Miss Gilbert of Limerick to become one of the most brilliant courtesans of the nineteenth century and the nemesis of King Ludwig I of Bavaria. Lavish costume pictures made in co-production were in vogue in the early 50s; and Ophüls' Lola, Martine Carol, had already been Lucrezia Borgia, Madame Dubarry and Nana for Christian-Jaque, and La Pompadour for Jean Delannoy. Ophüls' Franco-German producers clearly thought they knew what they were getting.

Their bewilderment and disappointment when



'Lola Montès': Lola at the centre of the circus

Ophüls gave them *Lola*, then, can readily be imagined. Instead of an easy novelette, it was a highly complex structure, rejecting conventional narrative progression, shading off into extreme stylisation and moments of surreality. The script, written by Ophüls in collaboration with Annette Wademant and Franz Geiger, imagined Lola in her final years, appearing in an American circus and recounting in tableaux, mime and acrobatics her scandalous past. From this framing sequence the film flashes back to a series of episodes, in (non-chronological) turn, the end of her love affair with Franz Liszt; her childhood and first marriage to her mother's brutal and drunken lover; a scandal when she was a young dancer in Nice; and (the longest) the Bavarian period, with Ludwig. Each episode is enriched in its significance by our foreknowledge of the ending; and Ophüls' fascination with Lola's exploiting of her own sexual attraction, and the converse exploitation of Lola herself, emphasises the modernity of the film's concerns.

Certainly *Lola* was before its time; and as certainly this disconcerting excellence was not what the producers expected or desired. Ophüls' 140 minute film was instantly cut down to 110 minutes. No one has ever seen a fuller version than this—excited rumours that the two copies that reached London for the Camden Plaza and Edinburgh Festival showings had an extra four minutes proved to be unfounded—and the film's negative was apparently cut up to make it. Only examination of the original script could reveal precisely what was cut—whether there were additional episodes, or whether the length of the existing episodes was originally better balanced.

Still not satisfied, the producers next totally re-edited the film, retaining only a short circus sequence at the end, and re-ordering the flashbacks to provide a continuous narrative. Ophüls' last strength was taken up with fighting to prevent this mutilated form from being shown in a French Film Festival in London; and he died in March 1957, aged 55.

Strangely, although in the years between we have had Jancsó and a whole theory of the superseding of conventional montage by *mise-en-shot* (to extend the sense of a phrase coined by Eisenstein), Ophüls' technique, the shots that are often entire sequences in themselves, the endlessly moving camera tracking backwards and forwards, up and down to expound and contain such complex action as the scene outside the Munich Opera, or the King's examination of the painters, looks if anything more startling today. A negative reason

may be that occasionally, it must be confessed, the shots are ostentatious in their indulgent show-off. (This is maybe true even of the celebrated sequence in the theatre, where the camera follows Lola's progress up staircase after staircase, from *étage* to *étage*, and back again to pit level.) More positively, Ophüls really has not been excelled in the brilliance and fluency of, say, Lola's symbolic rise on the trapezes to the top of the circus tent. And then, too, this was perhaps the very last moment when such extravagance was possible for anyone, when even an Ophüls could have afforded to realise d'Eaubonne's sets and Annenkov's costumes, or so recklessly to indulge a whim like the sequence in which an entire palace and a cast of—well, dozens at least—are deployed for the production of a simple needle and thread.

People were still self-conscious then about the CinemaScope screen. Ophüls not only mastered it but made it a perfect instrument for the baroque of his camera. When the shape was wrong, and could not be corrected by the omnipresent draperies and pillars and architectural details and fluttering curtains and windows and stairways, he simply masked off the unwanted part of the screen. In the new prints the sound has been restored to a brilliance which captures the full glory of Auric's score, as it translates the sumptuous music of Lola's courtly days to the unkind harsh excitements of the circus. There is only a twenty-two years' memory against which to test the colour; but from a recollection of comparing original artists' designs with the realised colour at the time, I have a feeling that Matras' Eastman Colour originally was richer by a lot more blue.

As to the performances, Peter Ustinov, Anton Walbrook, Oskar Werner and the cunningly cast minor roles have not suffered at all from time. Martine Carol was never a distinguished actress, so that Ophüls was obliged to restrict her to the role of *tabula rasa*, a centre to reflect the action around her. Or at least that is the case with the French version with which we have so far been familiar. The Edinburgh Festival screenings, however, made it possible for the first time to see the German version, which Ophüls is said to have preferred. Ustinov and of course Walbrook and Werner dub their own voices. Carol, however, is dubbed by a more than competent German actress who gives the doll-like figure an altogether more incisive and positive role. It at least brings us one more detail nearer to Ophüls' whole, original conception of his thwarted masterwork.

DAVID ROBINSON



'My Way Home': Jamie (Stephen Archibald) in his new suit

My Way Home

Bill Douglas, the illegitimate son of a feckless miner, was born in 1937 and grew up in the Scottish village of Newcraighall and later in an Edinburgh children's home: much of his childhood was spent, it seems, in silent contemplation of the bewildering and sometimes frightening capriciousness of the adults with whom he was compelled to live. Having followed his father down the pit, Douglas subsequently moved to England and worked as an actor (in television and with Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop); he graduated from the London Film School in 1970 and then, with finance from the BFI Production Board, embarked on the long and rigorous task of distilling his youth into three films, *My Childhood* (1973), *My Ain Folk* (1974) and now, finally, *My Way Home*. Anyone who has seen this trilogy, I would judge, will never entirely forget Newcraighall: the slag heaps and cobbled streets; the terraced cottages with their facing front-doors; the footbridge over the railway with its steam locomotives and open coal trucks. Nor, entirely, the furrowed, serious face of Jamie, Douglas' youthful self, who is played throughout the three films by Stephen Archibald.

The individuality of Douglas' films stems not only from that almost palpable sense of pain and desolation which the spectator derives from almost every sequence, but also from the vice-like manner in which they are constructed. Several critics have noted that the first two films (48 and 55 minutes long respectively) appear to contain much more than their running times would normally allow. This, ironically, is due to the fact that the spectator is forced to supply almost all the threads connecting the characters: we are simply presented with the incidents of Jamie's youth, there is very little conventional narrative or sense of the passage of time. It is on the meticulous editing of the bleak, sharp, monochrome images that the trilogy's sense of drama is most firmly based. (It is no coincidence that Douglas inserts a direct tribute to Dovzhenko in *My Way Home*.) The characters, the majority of whom are non-professional players, are posed in tableaux, or frequently frozen in mid-gesture, giving the films a tone—together with the intense realism—of dreamlike remembrance.

The memoir begins in 1945 when Jamie and his older cousin Tommy are living alone with their destitute grannie: while other children welcome fathers home from the pit, the apparently orphaned Jamie picks over the slag heap. One day, Tommy's

father appears and presents his son with a canary; grannie later vents her impotent anger at the man by attempting to kill the bird, Jamie's cat finishes the task and then Tommy in a rage beats the cat to death. This latter sequence of hopeless anger followed by senseless violence recurs, in different guises, throughout the three films and proves, almost until the end, to be Jamie's first reaction to many of the misfortunes which befall him. His only friend is a German prisoner-of-war, Helmuth, who at the end of the war, to Jamie's incomprehension, is repatriated. One of the constant themes of his youth is the way in which people enter and leave his life without his control. The mystery of Jamie's parents is partly revealed by Tommy, who intimates that a silent man with a whippet is in fact his father; one day, grannie takes Jamie to a mental hospital to see his mother, one of the patients—Jamie has brought her an apple, but this is adroitly pocketed by one of the nurses. The giving and taking of apples, the fruit both of knowledge and of lost innocence, also develops into one of the unifying themes of the trilogy.

At the end of *My Childhood* (the titles of the three films are each tinged with irony), the grandmother dies and Jamie jumps from the footbridge and is carried away huddled in a coal truck. In *My Ain Folk*, Tommy is taken away to live in a home and Jamie, now returned to the village, who has until this moment known only the misery of having had no family, at a stroke finds himself—when he instinctively runs away to his father's terraced cottage—at the centre of a horrifying web of family ties. Jamie's father, designated as Mr. Knox in the script, but never called that in the sparse dialogue of the film, silently submits to the adoration of his mother, who, although she denies that the man has done anything for which he should reproach himself, nevertheless grudgingly accepts responsibility for Jamie, his natural son by a woman whom she repeatedly calls a 'whore'.

Jamie's father, it transpires (since the spectator is in a position similar to the boy, to whom, it seems, no one ever bothered to explain anything), is married to his mother's neighbour, the slutish Agnes, by whom he has another son. Matters are complicated by the return from the war of John, Jamie's paternal uncle, who is himself soon having an affair with Agnes. Eventually, Jamie's father leaves the village with another and apparently better-bred woman: this arrangement appears to satisfy Jamie's grandmother, whose desire for her son to improve himself transcends any vestige of

conventional morality she may still harbour. Jamie's paternal grandfather materialises in the course of the film (he too appears to have had some sort of affair with Agnes): a kindly old man, he is despised for his senility and infidelity by his wife, and finally in despair gases himself in the kitchen. By this time Jamie, who has already been to see Tommy in the home, willingly allows himself to be taken into care.

It is Christmas-time at the home and Jamie is experiencing the third major theme of the trilogy, the desolation of institutional life. *My Way Home* opens with a still photograph of the Royal Family, then a cut to a Nativity tableau at the boys' home, and again to a silent group of civic dignitaries. Jamie approaches the mayoral party with a bouquet; his rolled-up trousers slip down under his kilt. This slight touch of humour deftly undercuts the seriousness of the preceding establishment institutions, together with the 'Scotsman's' concept of 'Scotland'. (Douglas' feeling about this last notion was brilliantly encapsulated by the long-held last shot of *My Ain Folk* in which a marching band in full regalia swept around the corner of the street playing 'Scotland the Brave' just after the van carrying Tommy to the home had passed in the opposite direction.) The enveloping tone of despair in the first two films has been occasionally lightened by the odd, affecting touch of kindness: Jamie's friendship with Helmuth; his attempt to comfort his maternal grannie by pouring boiling water into a teacup and then wrapping her hands around it; the gift of a stolen apple to his paternal grandfather (his grandmother later left a mousetrap in the apple dish). One feels, however, that these have been merely instinctive actions. It is only when we come to *My Way Home* that we have any sense that Jamie has any conscious control over his life or understanding of his own identity. His first assertion of individuality comes on Christmas morning when, having like all the other boys been given a mouth-organ by the kindly warden, he is discovered studding his name on the instrument.

In *My Way Home*, Jamie observes for the first time the fact of human decay: previously all the characters—and perhaps his father in particular—appeared immutably fixed in their ways. In *My Ain Folk*, his maternal grandmother (Helena Glog) is a beady-eyed, irredeemably vindictive elderly woman capable only of a sort of maudlin affection for Jamie when she is drunk. Now, however, when Jamie returns to the village against the warden's advice with his temporarily solicitous father, the grandmother (Lennox Milne) has deteriorated into a pathetic creature, wrapped up in rags and existing in utter destitution. As a welcome home present she inscribes a copy of *David Copperfield* to 'My Young Prince': the ink runs out of her pen, however, when she comes to her own name, and later, accusing Jamie of having rubbed out the inscription, she precipitates another furious outburst when the boy rips up the book and hurls it on the floor in front of her. Here was the woman who in earlier years had marked a level on the milk bottles and lavished more affection on her son's whippet than on her own grandson. Having earlier treated the old woman with a measure of consideration, Jamie is now faced with the inescapable knowledge that he must sever his family ties with the village.

He returns temporarily to the boys' home, is fitted out for a suit and becomes a delivery boy. 'You look like a gentleman,' the tailor observes as Jamie stands ridiculously before a full-length mirror; we cut to a gentlemen's public lavatory where the suit is seen discarded in a corner. He goes up to a public school—another institution—and is put in his place by a kilted boy who mocks him for mispronouncing the name 'Gascoigne'. Later, Jamie finds himself in a Salvation Army hostel: he asks an older man to guard his plate of food since he has forgotten his spoon; the old man has finished his meal and offers his own implement instead. Jamie is now perhaps at the nadir of his fortune.

More time passes, and Jamie finds himself conscripted into the RAF and sent to Egypt. He makes friends with Robert, an educated, upper-

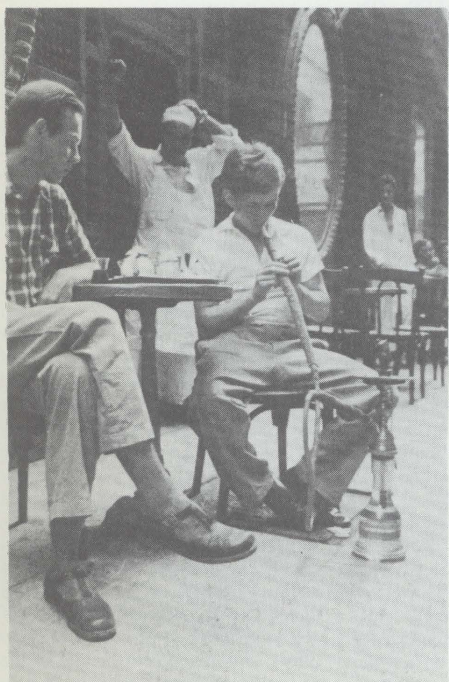
class young man who—in contrast to Jamie's pin-ups of Marilyn Monroe—has over his bunk portraits of selected 20th century intellectuals (including Dovzhenko). It is through Robert that Jamie, who had earlier expressed a desire to become an artist and had the idea knocked firmly on the head by his stepmother ('If you were meant to be different, you would have been born different'), finally finds the self-confidence to slough off the apathy that has characterised all his village, family and institutional life. (And, for institutional values, the RAF with its brick-painting and sand-rolling chores offers a regime little different from that of the boys' home.)

One of Douglas's great virtues as a film-maker is his eye for the telling detail: the full colour, ironical clip from *Lassie Come Home* at the beginning of *My Ain Folk*; the pipe band; Tommy standing defiantly in front of Jamie's father with his hands encased in two jam-jars (the price of admission to the village 'cinema'). At this crucial point, Douglas chooses an exact metaphor for Robert and Jamie's relationship: the boning of a kipper. Faced with the fish, Jamie at first simply gives up; Robert shows him how; he still cannot manage it himself, so Robert gives him his own plate. 'Thanks,' Jamie says—for, it seems, the first time in his life. Jamie's stay in Egypt also makes him aware that he is not the only poverty-stricken boy in the world: on a visit to town he sits helplessly in the back of a truck, pulling out his empty pockets, as a little boy begs for money. Goaded beyond endurance by Jamie's listlessness ('You're looking at one of the Seven Wonders of the World,' he says in vain as Jamie regards the Pyramids), Robert finally gives up trying to make Jamie suggest something they can do to relieve the tedium of service life. At last, Jamie suggests they go to a mosque: guidebook in hand, he leads Robert into the central courtyard and points out the beauties of the building. The camera pulls back and the two diminutive figures are caught in the middle of an immense abstract pattern of flagstones.

As they are about to be demobbed, Robert gives Jamie a piece of paper: 'Keep it in a safe place. If you feel like it, look us up some time. No need to feel shy, if you like you can stay; if you want you can call it home.' Home is, in fact, the world of art: the abstract designs of the mosque, the volume of Kafka that Robert has lent Jamie. For the first time in the three films, Douglas resorts to overt symbolism. The camera tracks around the now white-washed room where Jamie and Tommy lived with their maternal grannie and then cuts to a windblown tree in full blossom.

JOHN PYM

'My Way Home': Jamie discovers Egypt



Look Here

from page 256

we were covering the controversial Northern Ireland issue, and failed to give us acres of preview and review space; this, I subsequently told myself, was pure ego-mania (although I have a nagging feeling that one of the functions of the programme is to obtain press notices so that LWT can pat itself on its corporate back every so often—not a dishonourable intention, by any means, in the part regulated, part free market ITV system). I look naturally to fellow programme-makers for approbation of the show—again, wholly wrong, for not only do most of them know the subject matter we deal with at least as well as I do, and therefore have strong opinions on how it ought to be interpreted, but they also bring a professional's point of view to the production style and technique of the show which is inevitably coloured by their own predilections. I assume that people who've been in the game longer than I have have learned to set up their own critical and approbation systems, but I haven't dealt with that one yet.

When I joined LWT from *Broadcast*, where I had spent much time analysing and observing the industry (not a least part of which is London Weekend Television) from outside, I experienced few surprises about the way in which the broadcasting institution operates. The views I had accumulated on the outside were on the whole confirmed from the inside, which is more of a tribute to the transparency of the industry's procedures than to my own journalistic observation.

But there was one important and gratifying surprise in store for me when *Look Here* got under way, and that is to do with the system of editorial control operated by London Weekend. Barry Cox, head of current affairs, is the executive producer of the programme, and I deal with him in much the same way that a departmental editor at a newspaper or a magazine would deal with the overall editor of the paper. I and my team (of two researchers and a director, who changes with each programme) prepare a script for the programme; Barry Cox approves (and sometimes improves on) the general theme, and then edits the script at pre-film, camera script and sometimes camera rehearsal stages. This is carried out in an informal manner, and there is no attempt to impose any particular editorial line, interpretation or style on the programme, although there are some stylistic implications which are inherent in working at LWT—the first style you have to master is the *Weekend World* style, at any rate. John Birt makes it a point never to discuss a programme in detail (or, often, at all) until after it has been transmitted.

Contrary to the cynical view, there is no attempt at all to insert an ITV 'line' into the programme, no attempt to protect people in the company or in the industry from criticism by the programme, and no restriction (apart from the infuriating legal restriction) on the topics we can tackle. Our programme on Northern Ireland was very critical of the IBA (which saw the script, took a very deep corporate breath, and insisted on no changes). Our show on the fourth channel put the ITV-2 point of view as a matter of obtaining journalistic balance, but overall took a very different line from that being promoted by the ITV companies. To

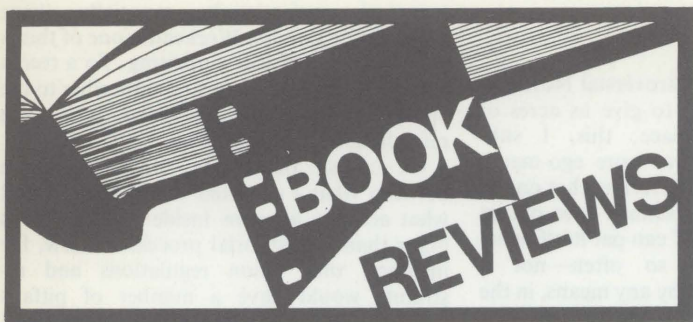
seasoned professionals, especially those working for London Weekend, none of this is new and none of it is surprising. To a recent entrant from outside, or to a subscriber to the conspiracy theory of television, it is both refreshing and encouraging.

Of course there was some divergence between what I expected would happen and what actually happens inside LWT in areas other than the editorial process. I knew, for instance, that union regulations and restraints would have a number of pitfalls which would have to be circumnavigated with care; but it came as a surprise when our card-waving ACTT crew was prevented from filming at Thames Television by their card-waving shop stewards on the grounds that we didn't have as big a sound crew as Thames is obliged to have (even though we were LWT and not Thames, if you see what I mean). And the hoops and barrels that we seem to have to jump through in order to film on ABS-organised BBC premises with an ITV crew far surpass the problems we encounter in getting the BBC to answer the criticisms made of it editorially. On the technical side, it came as a surprise that a company for whose engineering system I have always had much respect should employ a chroma key system which was still primitive (which leaves one full of admiration for the ways in which the vision engineers manage to overcome its limitations).

There is a great deal left to learn. Of this the most important aspect is probably the question of current affairs film-making for television, though by the time we have conquered the immense stylistic, structural and other questions which surround this topic it will probably all have been replaced by electronic newsgathering techniques—and if you know anything about the time it will take for ENG to take hold in British television, then you know how long it will take for us to get a grip on the questions of current affairs film-making.

But what particularly needs tackling is the assimilation of the factual film-making tradition into the word-oriented journalistic tradition, which at its worst produces a succession of talking heads, and even at its best produces a kind of discursive television which is far removed from the essentially visual narratives proposed by the documentary form in which factual television ought to recognise more of its origins. We are as guilty at *Look Here* as any other programme of doing no more than assemble talking heads, sometimes hopefully linked with 'wallpaper', which is the disparaging jargon term used to refer to visual illustration.

Many factual programmes, of course, deal with ideas rather than with concrete events which are appropriate to visual treatment; nevertheless, every time we cut from one talking head to the next I feel as though we have in some way failed not only the ghosts of Flaherty and Grierson but also the viewer, who bought a TV set because unlike the radio it shows pictures as well. As long as the ideas are engaging, the form is tolerable. But I came to the realisation that it can be very boring as well in an unexpected way. There we were, filming this very important interview with this very important Tory politician when I noticed the assistant sparks stretched out on the floor of the House of Commons committee room, fast asleep...



BOOK REVIEWS

AMERICAN SILENT FILM

By William K. Everson

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, £6.95

'As a statement of cinematic prowess which is re-absorbed by the diegesis, the special effect admits and contests its status as fabrication.' That was the opening of an article on the silent version of *Peter Pan* (1925) which appeared not so long ago in a critical magazine. It suggests the level of re-education to which film enthusiasts must apparently aspire before they can become film historians.

It is an approach deplored by William K. Everson in his new book *American Silent Film*. He believes that the language of other disciplines, such as social anthropology, acts as a deterrent to film appreciation. Although it is far from being exclusive to silent film, such a smokescreen deadens interest instead of stimulating it. 'A structuralist analysis of one sight gag in Buster Keaton's *Cops* takes far longer to read than the gag does to play,' writes Everson. 'And all it achieves is to confirm the information, in pompous rhetoric, that Keaton was able to convey instinctively, visually, and amusingly in a few seconds. It does one more thing; in peeling away the "layers" of the gag, it gives it a sombre importance that Keaton never intended, and effectively destroys it for future viewing.'

The silent film has been subject to such abuses over the years—projected at speeds ranging from the ludicrously fast to the infuriatingly slow, copied with such crudity that technical polish is removed by technical ineptitude, and tittered at by supposedly sophisticated audiences—that this latest injustice, Everson thinks, is as real a danger to the cause of film history as the deterioration of nitrate stock. That Everson should include such an attack in a book of film history is a significant indication of how attitudes are changing. Where once it was essential to see a film before writing about it, now—to quote a prominent figure in the field—'it is more important to read about a film than to see it.'

This is not the world that Everson inhabits. For Everson was a film teacher long before he practised the job professionally. He has never been content to pass on received opinions. When he arrived in America from England, in the 1940s, he quickly recognised the shortcomings of film availability, and he set out to rediscover rare films of the silent and early sound era. He rescued many himself, and he contributed to the rescue of many others. More im-

portant, Everson helped to create the atmosphere in which the rediscovery of such films was considered important.

For many years he ran the Theodore Huff Memorial Film Society in New York, and for every show he provided programme notes which were models of their kind. Copies of these notes rapidly became collectors' items themselves. They contained not only cast and credits and painstaking research; they contained enthusiasm. I was profoundly impressed by these Huff Society notes when I was young, for in those days in England the approved attitude towards silent films was the Paul Rotha school: American films were negligible, with the exceptions of Griffith and Chaplin, and the only worthwhile productions were European. Such silent films as were shown over here confirmed that attitude.

But I had stumbled upon many forgotten American silents on 9.5mm and 16mm. It was Everson (through these notes) who related them to the period in which they were made, told me about the men who made them and expanded my cinematic knowledge. I began work on a book, *The Parade's Gone By*, as a direct result of Everson's influence. When I went to see him in New York in the early 60s, I found him incredibly busy. He had no reason to take my work seriously, yet he screened rare silent films for me every night from midnight until 3 a.m., and discussed them afterwards. In three weeks concentrated viewing, I learned more about the cinema than I had learned from all my years of undirected research.

When I heard that Everson was publishing a book on the subject, I hoped for a work of encyclopaedic length, containing all those Huff Society notes. Yet the book is streamlined, and compresses the entire period into 347 pages. The result is surprisingly effective. One is never aware of compression; it is measured and well-organised, written with pace and style. The introduction, however, suggests that the years of concentrated viewing have finally caused a certain staleness; Everson talks of becoming 'strangely jaded'. But I think he dropped the remark in order to alarm his old admirers. The enthusiasm and vitality of the rest of the book are undiminished.

The book is unique, for Everson has seen all the films he writes about. His tremendous knowledge provides an objectivity rare in film historians. He can point to the defects in a silent film by referring to a similar scene in

an early talkie; he does not try to claim, as I did in my first flush of enthusiasm, that everything of any importance was done in silent pictures, and the cinema ended in 1929. (However, I was delighted to learn that Preston Sturges was a silent film fan, and that Coppola, while making *Godfather 2*, found value in an Ince film of 1915.) What he does say—and the idea should be put up in lights over the National Film Theatre—is that the silent film was a totally different medium from the sound film, as separate as painting and sculpture.

The book is unique for another reason, which makes it historic in itself. In recent years, archives all over the world have discovered enormous quantities of silent film. Some of these discoveries challenge the accepted view that Griffith was the progenitor of film technique. A former student of Everson's, Richard Koszarski, has mounted an elaborate season called *The Rivals of D.W. Griffith*, including early features by such directors as Reginald Barker, Maurice Tourneur, Frank Borzage, John Ford, John Collins, Marshall Neilan and C.B. DeMille, which were so skilful that they cast considerable doubt on Griffith's pre-eminence. Everson, whose favourite director has always been Griffith, absorbs all these film-makers into his book and discusses them warmly and perceptively. He even manages to dim the halo from Griffith's image. But then he digs in, and mounts such a convincing defence of Griffith's work that one's interest in him is completely regenerated.

This seems to me the object of film teaching. Not to strangle interest at birth by demanding that students learn a new language (plain English can be most eloquent). But to fire their enthusiasm for the subject, and to ensure that the time they have devoted is not for a second wasted. Everson has achieved that in his work and in his book.

KEVIN BROWNLOW

THE SPONSOR: NOTES ON A MODERN POTENTATE

By Erik Barnouw

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, £5.50

Erik Barnouw closes his overview of the role and power of the sponsor in American television by quoting Adam Smith. Even the economist most closely identified with the theory of free enterprise had been forced to conclude that 'the government of an exclusive company of merchants is, perhaps, the worst of all governments for any country whatever.' It is Barnouw's own conclusion—and an incontrovertible one, I think—that 'the sponsor, the merchant, has been living at the summit of our communication system. He has had things largely his way, and we are in trouble.'

The numbers speak for themselves. One quarter of every hour of television time in the U.S. is given over to commercials. An average viewer is thus exposed to at least two full hours of advertising messages each and every day of his or her life. Moreover, as Barnouw demon-

strates, what passes for 'entertainment' or 'culture' (the inverted commas are his) has been carefully designed to provide a nurturing and supportive atmosphere for the real purpose of television, advertising. This has led to a dramaturgy that favours action/adventure over the drama of ideas, that forces climaxes every seven to ten minutes (just before each commercial break), and that cleaves to subject matter which closely fits the right of centre views of advertisers. None of this will come as much of a surprise to anyone familiar with left critiques of capitalist economics. What is important about Barnouw's short but effective analysis of the growth of the sponsor system is that he approaches Smith's feared rule by merchants from the point of view of the media critic and historian, not the economist. As he rediscovers certain economic and political truths in the history of broadcasting in the U.S., we can begin to see a kind of unified field theory emerging, as structures we know from the dismal science make their appearance, often unexpectedly, in the history of television.

As it happened, the commercial system of broadcasting, which is now so thoroughly pervasive, was never really legislated. In fact, the Communications Act of 1934 (which is now about to be revised) suggests by its emphasis on 'the public interest' that the Congress had never wanted the broadcast spectrum to become the highly lucrative commercial commodity it is today. Advertising on U.S. radio began almost by accident. The earliest station operators feared public reaction to 'advertising chatter'. AT&T began renting blocks of time on its 'toll' station in New York in 1922. Ten years later, that model system had given rise to the great radio networks. Indeed, even in the early years of television the broadcasters themselves maintained a relatively low profile, preferring to project an image of themselves as accommodating middlemen, perfectly willing to rent time on the 'public' airwaves which they controlled to anyone who had the money to buy it.

Even though most advertisers had few products to sell to private consumers during the Second World War, radio time sales grew rapidly. The reason for this seeming anomaly was simple. As Barnouw points out, with the war-time Excess Profits Tax approaching 90 per cent, it was eminently smart business to spend the excess cash being generated by the war economy on broadcast advertising—then deduct it as a business expense. Thus radio served as an important psychological primer during the war for the orgy of consumer spending which succeeded it. Barnouw makes a strong case for both radio and television broadcasting as utterly necessary to the development of the contemporary form of American capitalism, based as it is on ever-increasing consumption of ever shorter-lived products. The ethic of throwaways and instant obsolescence requires the instant and efficient means of communication which television offers to convince consumers of the necessity of new products. It also

depends heavily upon the model of the 'better life' which TV proselytises.

Although they had talked of doing so much earlier, network executives were not able to give up the fiction of block sales of time to advertisers until the late 1950s. It was the quiz show scandal of that era which finally permitted them to wrest control of programming from advertisers and institute the system which now operates—'scatter sales'. (Instead of, for example, buying outright the hour from 8 to 9 p.m. on Tuesday evenings and programming it as he wishes, the advertiser can now buy only inserts in a schedule which is entirely devised and programmed by the networks.) Liberal reformers in the 50s had long pleaded for such a change, but when it came it was clear that as much had been lost as was gained. Advertisers were no longer able to determine the nature of programming outright, but they managed to exert their influence behind the scenes just as effectively. And, in any event, the networks had precisely the same values and aims as the people to whom they sold time. All three are divisions of conglomerates that derive the bulk of their income, strange as it may seem, from the sale of consumer products, not from television. All this may change in the next few years as the broadcast networks face the challenge of new technologies; yet, as Barnouw wisely notes, '... every step in modern media history ... stirred similar euphoric predictions. All were expected to usher in an age of enlightenment. All were seen as fulfilling the promise of democracy.' None did.

The *Sponsor* doesn't offer any solution out of this economic media dilemma, but it does outline crisply and intelligently just how we arrived at the present state of affairs. Barnouw is the author of the highly acclaimed three-volume *History of Broadcasting in the United States*. His new book gives us, efficiently and with considerable wisdom, the premise of commercialism which has been the motive force of that history. Like the earlier work, it is essential reading for anyone interested in the business and industry of television.

JAMES MONACO

ON PHOTOGRAPHY

By Susan Sontag

ALLEN LANE, £5.50

Although Susan Sontag's *On Photography* is in no sense a film book, it still seems worth attention in a specific film context. The subject is, as they say, a related area; and perhaps made to seem more nearly related through Susan Sontag's use of film references. *Freaks* turns up, as it was bound to do, in a discussion of Diane Arbus; among other movie objects on display there's the postcard collection in *Les Carabiniers* (the photograph as 'appropriation of the thing photographed') and the monkey which inadvertently earns Buster Keaton his newsreel scoop in *The Cameraman* (the surrealist connection). But as Susan Sontag sees her subject (in terms, as the blurb puts it, of 'the relation of photo-

graphy to art, to conscience and to knowledge') there is also a kind of persistent mental overlap with films: echoes and connections not made in the text, but still strong, about such assorted questions as the museum status of media objects, the problems of criticism for an art without a true critical tradition, or the changing faces of the documentary style.

The six essays first appeared in the *New York Review of Books*, and the format betrays itself in the way each chapter is shaped towards an essayist's elegant dying fall and in some repetitive aphorisms—'now all art aspires to the condition of photography' vying with 'it is inevitable that more and more art will be designed to end as photographs.' But the format also scores by suggesting that the writer found her subject expanding in front of her, yielding incidental aspects and detours, rather than that the terrain was fully mapped before the writing began. One realises, with some regret, that this sort of literary performance is currently out of fashion as far as cinema is concerned: as film criticism has become more specific it has also turned dour, perhaps frightening off the eclectic, speculative intelligence.

A consideration of Diane Arbus' unblinking look at freakishness leads Sontag into the area of conscience, and some comments that certainly hold true equally for films. Arbus' work is an 'instance of a leading tendency of high art in capitalist countries: to suppress, or at least reduce, moral and sensory queasiness ... a pseudo-familiarity with the horrible reinforces alienation.' To this truism (and it's the pseudo-familiarity that flies the danger signals) she adds an intriguing gloss. 'As the inhabitants of deviant underworlds are evicted from their restricted territories—banned as unseemly, a public nuisance, obscene or just unprofitable—they increasingly come to infiltrate consciousness as the subject matter of art, acquiring a certain diffuse legitimacy and metaphoric proximity which creates all the more distance.' For films, she looks across to Fellini, Arrabal and Jodorowsky—directors for the decade in which 'freaks went public'.

In a particularly enlightening section, Susan Sontag suggests that what angered the Chinese about Antonioni's documentary *Chung Kuo* was not merely what it had to say about China but what it had to say about camerawork. 'The Chinese resist the photographic dismemberment of reality ... Even the postcards of antiquities sold in museums do not show part of something: the object is always photographed straight on, centred, evenly lit and in its entirety.' Antonioni's images, she argues, 'simply mean more than any images the Chinese release of themselves. The Chinese don't want photographs to mean very much or to be very interesting ... Photographs are supposed to display what has already been described.' The suggestion that Antonioni's sin, in the Chinese view, was not merely that he photographed the old and shabby but that he took images to pieces, purloined them, looked obliquely rather than head on, is fascinating: the sharp points at

which ideological and aesthetic questions touch, identified initially in terms of camera angles.

If Susan Sontag is looking for a subject for a new essay collection, one would like to see her exploring some of the film/photography connections which this book only throws up indirectly. Film criticism has not thought too much lately about the photographic image as such, the relation between the way things look on the screen (particularly the American screen) and the way they look to the 'art' photographers or the photo journalists, or about the inexhaustibly intriguing question of the relation of the image to time, the way the camera's perpetual present becomes the instant past. This book suggests, if only by the way, what a fruitful field such a study might be.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

A CRITICAL HISTORY OF THE BRITISH CINEMA

By Roy Armes

SECKER AND WARBURG, £6.90

(hardback), £3.90 (paperback)

Anyone who travels through British cinema all the way from Birt Acres and R. W. Paul's film of the 1895 Derby to Malcolm LeGrice's minimalist *Blind White Duration* at least deserves our congratulations. Roy Armes is valiantly game for anything: in 336 pages of text he studiously visits every nook and cranny of the native industry, and also makes use of almost every native critical approach—the historical, the

sociological, the technological, the semiological. The declared object is to provide a synthesis of other people's findings and to offer 'a genuinely critical perspective on eighty years of British film making.' Both of these are enormous tasks, and it is unfortunate but inevitable that each should hinder the success of the other. Most chapters begin with the synthesis, linking the area of cinema under consideration with the current public and political mood. Each sentence seems to give way to quotation: we are always reading 'As A. J. P. Taylor states', or 'reminds us', or 'observes', even though the phrases quoted could often have been put in the author's own words.

The history in this *Critical History* is therefore merely potted—useful as far as it goes, but surely insufficient as a springboard for the considered survey Armes is attempting. Cradled by these received opinions, the 'genuinely critical perspective' looks peculiarly limited. For just as he dashes from historian to historian, so Armes dashes from film to film. Sometimes one suspects a game is afoot: how many titles and famous names (along with dates of birth and death) can be crammed into a single sentence? A surprising number are misspelt (and misdated) in the process. Who is this Tom Conway who directed *A Yank at Oxford*? What is this Charles Jarrott film *Marie Stuart, Queen of Scots*?

Armes' perspective looks clearer, and certainly more critical, if one stands further back and disentangles the argument from the clutter of facts and quotations. The Korda

John Russell Taylor

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chapter ('Korda and the Dominant
Myths of the 30s') usefully ties
together a body of films which may
seem irritatingly amorphous. And
the author's constant stress on the
retrospective, conservative habits of
British cinema (forever enshrining
attitudes and literary modes of past
decades) serves as a useful, if
depressing, reminder of the national
limitations. The stress is so marked,
indeed, that one wonders if Arnes
has much more than an academic
interest in the cinema he is so
laboriously documenting—though
perhaps the effort of surveying the
field from so many facets left no time
or energy for simple enthusiasm and
commitment.

GEOFF BROWN

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BFI PRODUCTION BOARD for *My Way
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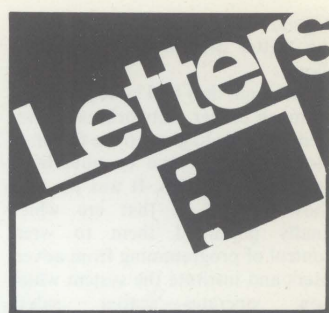
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Stanley Hawes

SIR,—Several articles have appeared
recently, including a piece in the
NFT programme magazine, about
what is called the new Australian
Cinema. Not one of them that I have
read pays tribute to the work of
Stanley Hawes who, after his early
work in England with me at Strand
Films, and his fine work during the
war with Grierson at the National
Film Board of Canada, became
Head of the Australian Film Board
and the Commonwealth Film Unit.
Many of the young men who now
make up the 'new' Australian film
movement gained their first know-
ledge of films with Hawes. Yet no
tribute is made to him, as it has been
in the UK and Canada to John
Grierson.

Yours faithfully,

PAUL ROTHA

Thame, Oxon.

Proust's Madeleine

SIR,—As any good Proustian can
tell Tom Milne (who reviewed
Pinter's *Proust Screenplay* in your
Summer issue), tante Leonie's petite
madeleine was dipped not in coffee,
but in tea or a lime tisane. The
mother's madeleine, offered to the
narrator in middle age, was dipped in
tea. May I remind Mr. Milne, whose
remembrance is unprovisionally falter-
ing, that 'tout Combray . . . est sorti
de ma tasse de thé.'

Yours faithfully,

BETZY DINESEN

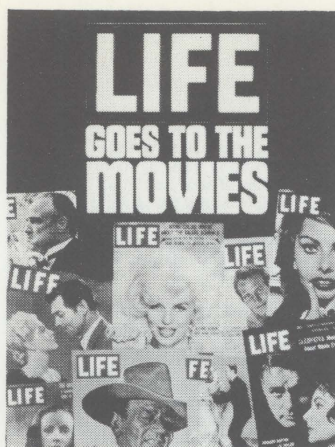
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Film Guide

*AMERICAN HOT WAX (CIC)

Another watershed in the history of popular music: the night they raided disc jockey Alan Freed's first anniversary rock 'n' roll show and put paid to the career of the music's patron saint. Songwriter Tim McIntire is well cast as Freed, but director Floyd Mutrux sacrifices all dramatic and historical interest for the sake of a show-biz extravaganza. (Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis.)

*BACKROADS (Scala)

Director Phillip Noyce combines a discursive road movie narrative with a sense of authentic outrage at the wretched state of the Australian Aborigine. Melodrama and the exigencies of a tiny budget eventually carry the day, but not before Noyce has sharply focused on the Aborigine's role in his own oppression. (Gary Foley, Bill Hunter.)

BETWEEN THE LINES

(Essential)

In her second feature (after *Hester Street*), Joan Micklin Silver brings a narrow and unappealingly naive style to another historical slice of life. Ms. Silver has too little perspective on her subject—the tribulations of a counter-culture Boston newspaper and its staff of disillusioned 60s activists—and too much identification with her winsome people. (John Heard, Lindsay Crouse, Jeff Goldblum.)

BIG SLEEP, THE (ITC)

Philip Marlowe (sleepy-eyed Robert Mitchum) ambles through London and the Home Counties seemingly oblivious to the fact that skulduggery in Chandler's Los Angeles of the 30s makes very little sense when slavishly transposed to sunny, present-day England. (Sarah Miles, Oliver Reed, James Stewart; director, Michael Winner.)

**BLOOD RELATIVES (Rank)

Based on an Ed McBain novel and set in Montreal, Chabrol's Canadian film is less a whodunit than—once again—an acute analysis of the family circumstances surrounding a murder. Reputedly a disaster, the film turns out to be well up to Chabrol's subtle standards. (Donald Sutherland, Aude Landry, Stéphane Audran.)

*BOXER, THE (Marquee)

Shuji Terayama's story of a has-been boxer and his young protégé is full of idiosyncratic cross-currents: the old man holds the younger responsible for the death of his brother; the story periodically stops to take in scenes at a local tavern, where failures from all walks of life gather. But the film remains stuck between *Rocky* and Terayama's more genuinely surrealist creations. (Bunta Sugawara, Kentaro Shimizu.)

CHEAP DETECTIVE, THE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Producer Ray Stark attempts yet again to recast and parody scenes from Bogart classics. As the stellar cast manfully struggles with the intricacies of Neil Simon's exceptionally contrived plot, one recalls that Woody Allen performed the whole exercise with far greater ease and originality. (Peter Falk, Louise Fletcher, Madeline Kahn; director, Robert Moore.)

CITIZENS BAND (Cinegate)

Jonathan Demme's comic slice of small-town Americana, in which a kind of community spirit has been

reborn courtesy of the citizens' band radio, is dismayingly heavy-handed. The major jokes are telegraphed well in advance, and as a front-runner in this new genre it is quickly outclassed by *Convoy*. (Paul Le Mat, Candy Clark.)

**CONVOY (Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Kris Kristofferson leads a group of truckers (fighting for Sam Peckinpah's individual brand of independence) against a cop, Ernest Borgnine, determined with equal good humour to defend his right to throw the book at them for breaking a law which neither side respects. (Burt Young, Ali MacGraw.) *Reviewed.*

**CRIA CUERVOS (Gala)

Limpid and touching study of the power of childhood memory, with Ana Torrent superb as the little girl who conjures up the comforting presence of her dead mother (Geraldine Chaplin). Tantalising political overtones, sinister undercurrents in the picture of childhood innocence. (Conchi Perez; director, Carlos Saura.) *Reviewed.*

DEATH ON THE NILE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Maggie Smith and Angela Lansbury lead the scene-stealing in this carbon copy of *Murder on the Orient Express*. Strikingly photographed Egyptian locations are cancelled out by Peter Ustinov's monotonously mannered Poirot, a highly guessable ending and some minor touches of racial patronage. (Jane Birkin, David Niven, Bette Davis; director, John Guillermin.)

**DESPAIR (Gala)

Brilliant opening twenty minutes or so, with Dirk Bogarde delighting in the verbal eccentricities. After that, Nabokov's beautiful butterfly is crushed by Fassbinder's elephantine attempts to impose a message about Nazism. (Andrea Ferreol, Klaus Löwitsch.) *Reviewed.*

*ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE, AN

(Enterprise)

A careful, conscientiously acted version of Ibsen's play, preaching solemnly to the converted by way of Arthur Miller's adaptation. Distinguished chiefly by Lourie's superb, colour-drained production design. (Steve McQueen, Charles Durning, Bibi Andersson; director, George Schaefer.)

F.I.S.T. (United Artists)

F.I.S.T. comes on big and strong as the history of an American trucking union, from violent confrontations in the 30s to inevitable corruption in the present. But its style and political analysis belong to the world of Harold Robbins and the TV mini-series. Sylvester Stallone has some effective *Rocky*-style scenes amid the glib phrase-making. (Rod Steiger, Peter Boyle, Melinda Dillon; director, Norman Jewison.)

FURY, THE (Fox)

More hocus-pocus pyrotechnics from Brian De Palma, this time in the service of a plot that is not so much Hitchcockian (à la *Carrie*) as a wispy excuse for theatre of the absurd stunts. The film's *coup de grâce* and *raison d'être* is its destruction of the villain by literally blowing him apart: a quote from *Zabriskie Point*? (Kirk Douglas, John Cassavetes, Amy Irving.)

**GIRLFRIENDS

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

This empathetic study of a young woman photographer's loneliness and social vulnerability in New York City is notable for the central performance of Melanie Mayron. Claudia Weill's modest first feature provides an American antidote to some of the rose-tinted simplifications of Varda's *L'Une Chante, L'Autre Pas*. (Eli Wallach, Viveca Lindfors.)

GO TELL THE SPARTANS

(United Artists)

A Vietnam drama which goes all the way back to 1964, not in order to understand causes but to bemoan America's coming disillusionment. Burt Lancaster is a cynical World War II veteran, leading his lambs to a slaughter in which self-pity and

romanticism cloyingly combine. (Craig Wasson, Evan Kim; director, Ted Post.)

GREASE (CIC)

A desperately exuberant though no longer youthful cast grinds through Jim Jacobs and Warren Casey's money-minting musical about the vicissitudes of true love at a California high school in the 50s. John Travolta preens; Olivia Newton-John simpers; charmlessness prevails. (Stockard Channing, Jeff Conaway; director, Randal Kleiser.)

*HITLER A CAREER (GTO)

Historian Joachim C. Fest essayed a tone of studied disinterest in his reconstruction of the tyrant's 'career'. What emerges, however, is less the intended educational aid and more a trip down memory lane: the horrors are not ignored, but we are encouraged to marvel at the pageantry of Nazism. (Co-director, Christian Herrendoerfer.)

HOUSE CALLS (CIC)

Snatches of witty repartee and moments of sustained humour ultimately fail to buoy up this woolly tale of American medical malpractice. It's unfortunate, remembering *Sliker* and *Hearts of the West*, that Howard Zieff here relies so heavily on the genuine but now increasingly stereotyped talents of Glenda Jackson and Walter Matthau. (Richard Benjamin, Art Carney.)

INTERNATIONAL VELVET (CIC)

This sponge-like fantasy has young Tatum O'Neal winning the three-day event for Britain at some future Olympic Games. Bryan Forbes' prettified, sentimental stab at big-picture 'entertainment' leaves little room for doubt that all will eventually turn out for the best. (Nanette Newman, Christopher Plummer, Anthony Hopkins.)

*I WANNA HOLD YOUR HAND

(CIC)

Steven Spielberg was executive producer on this comic romp about the Beatles' visit to the States to appear on the Ed Sullivan Show. The result is not as perceptive about popular culture, or as funny about the media, as *Close Encounters*, but it scores some hits with its period gags amid a welter of misspent energy. (Nancy Allen, Wendie Jo Sperber; director, Robert Zemeckis.)

**LAST WALTZ, THE

(United Artists)

Martin Scorsese's stunning record of The Band's farewell concert, which he annexes to his own personal mythology, simultaneously celebrating *Götterdämmerung* and a new dawn as both film and music explore the history of the rock scene. (The Band, Bob Dylan.)

**LOLA MONTES (Artificial Eye)

Max Ophüls' ill-fated masterpiece, cut to ribbons and even now being shown in a faded colour print. Nevertheless it is a masterpiece: a dazzling conjuring trick in which theatre and life, produced like rabbits out of the hat of a circus performance, fleetingly reveal the face behind the mask of Lola Montes, lady of scandal. (Martine Carol, Peter Ustinov, Anton Walbrook.) *Reviewed.*

**LOVE LETTERS FROM TERALBA

ROAD, THE (Scala)

A small-scale, notably successful reconstruction of a disintegrating working-class Australian marriage. Writer-director Stephen Wallace used a packet of real letters found in a Sydney apartment as the basis for this elliptical, powerfully acted study of the existence of hope in the face of seemingly overwhelming despair. (Kris McQuade, Bryan Brown.)

**MY WAY HOME (BFI)

The triumphant last part of Bill Douglas' rigorous autobiographical trilogy; Jamie finally frees himself from the enveloping apathy induced by his childhood in a Scottish mining village through contact with an

educated conscript during National Service in Egypt. Flecked with humour and executed with a relentless formal intensity. (Stephen Archibald, Paul Kermack, Joseph Blatchley.) *Reviewed.*

**ONE AND ONLY, THE (CIC)

Bright, brilliantly scripted vehicle for Henry Winkler as an impossible egocentric who gets sidetracked from stage stardom into a weird and wonderful wrestling career; less successful (apart from the marvellous Kim Darby as his long-suffering wife) when it shows signs of seriousness. (Gene Saks; director, Carl Reiner.)

*REVENGE OF THE PINK

PANTHER (United Artists)

The fifth and flattest of the Clouseau saga, in which failing invention is overtaken by creeping elephantiasis. The parade of Clouseau's disguises, the jet-setting locations and set-pieces of mass destruction all but swamp Blake Edwards' finer observances of silent comedy technique. (Peter Sellers, Dyan Cannon, Robert Webber.)

**SHORT EYES (Success)

In a holding block in New York's Tombs jail, a suspect (Bruce Davison) finds his life threatened and ultimately taken by his fellow prisoners. Adapted by Miguel Piñero from his own play, *Short Eyes*, prison slang for a child molester, effectively registers as a moral and palpably terrifying prison drama. (José Perez, Nathan George; director, Robert M. Young.) *Reviewed.*

SILENT PARTNER, THE

(Enterprise)

Unacceptable levels of sadism and gratuitous violence mar this ingenious Canadian caper movie by *Payday* director Daryl Duke. The vulgarity is compounded by a patronising performance by Elliott Gould, as a felonious bank clerk, and an overblown study in vicious affectation by Christopher Plummer. (Susannah York, Celine Lomez.)

STEPFORD WIVES, THE

(Contemporary)

Bryan Forbes' 1974 excursion into speculative/admonitory science fiction: in a peaceful commuters' suburb, the husbands have turned into technological Fausts, selling out their wives for the sake of *Playboy* and *House and Garden* fantasies. The film's glossy style does not so much provide a context as underline the hollow hypocrisy of the subject. (Katharine Ross, Paula Prentiss.)

SWARM, THE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

A ramshackle blockbuster about killer bees wiping out half of Texas. The elderly supporting cast (Richard Widmark, Olivia de Havilland, Fred MacMurray, et al.) harks back to the 40s; the cursory plot to the low-budget science-fiction cycle of the 50s. (Michael Caine, Katharine Ross; director, Irwin Allen.)

*THANK GOD IT'S FRIDAY

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Intermittently engaging, soft-centred disco-movie about the fevered need of today's youngsters to boogie the night away. A bandwagon picture if ever there was one, but for all that a pleasantly unpretentious example of late 70s popular entertainment. (Jeff Goldblum, Chick Vennera, Ray Vitte; director, Robert Klane.)

WATERSHIP DOWN (CIC)

Over-exact animation and over-familiar voices (John Hurt, Richard Briers) reduce the subtlety and animal-eye viewpoint of Richard Adams' best-seller. There are moments of pleasure, however, in the stylised mythological prologue and in Zero Mostel's manic Balkan seabird. (Director, Martin Rosen.)

WOMBLING FREE (Rank)

Saddled with instantly forgettable songs, a flabby plot, and a bromidic human family cut to the Disney pattern, the Wombles of Wimbledon make a sadly inauspicious big screen debut. (Bonnie Langford, David Tomlinson; director, Lionel Jeffries.)

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